

**‘Making a Difference’: What it Means  
for Early Career Teachers Working in  
Designated Disadvantaged Schools**

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**July 2014**

## Declaration

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## Abstract

### **‘Making a Difference’: What it Means for Early Career Teachers Working in Designated Disadvantaged Schools**

Given the increasing influence of overly rationalistic and technicist views of teaching, it is even more difficult to imagine education as a transformative praxis (Apple, 2005, 2011, Lingard & Keddie, 2013). By viewing themselves as public intellectuals and cultural workers, teachers can ‘make a difference’ in terms of social justice. Focusing specifically on Irish primary teachers in disadvantaged schools, this study explores early career teachers’ understandings of ‘making a difference’ and what shape this takes in their day-to-day practice. This study defines ‘early career teachers’ as those with a minimum of three and a maximum of nine years teaching experience.

The literature indicates that while the experiences of teachers in the early stages of their professional lives has become a topic of interest for Irish researchers, much of it has been concerned with teachers in the first five years of their careers. No previously published research has provided critical socio-cultural analysis of the life-worlds of Irish early career teachers.

In order to explore and shine light on the professional lived experiences of early career teachers, a narrative life history methodology grounded in phenomenology was adopted. Semi-structured, life-history interviews were conducted with 18 participants drawn from three urban designated disadvantaged schools. The factors and processes that shape the professional identities, felt responsibilities and practices of early career teachers were investigated and explored through their stories of becoming and being teacher.

The study’s empirical findings are integrated with concepts drawn from critical educator and sociology discourses, equality perspectives, and teacher identity literatures. There were two distinct and contradictory views of ‘making a difference’ articulated in participants’ understandings of ‘making a difference’. The first view was concerned with working towards sameness in the name of equality and making a difference. In response to academic and policy demands, this view of ‘making a difference’ was characterised by pedagogies of sameness and understandings of equality as sameness. The second view was underpinned by a caring ethic that characterised their educational relationships, and was in tension with these pedagogies and practices of sameness.

This research concludes that the concept of ‘making a difference’ is complex, and the variation in situations in which it is produced and articulated means that it is best understood as a context, career-stage and habitus specific idea. It is also a fluid and relational concept that is capable of evolution and change, with positive and negative implications for teaching and learning. The study concludes that it is through engagement with the political, as well as the moral, ethical and emotional dimensions of teaching that teachers can continue to make a significant difference to students’ lives.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor Dr Maeve O'Brien. I am extremely thankful for her unequivocal and unstinting support and encouragement over the past five years. Not only has my thesis benefitted greatly from her constructive feedback, critical insights and intellectual rigour, but I personally have been inspired by her commitment and passion for what she does. I would also like to thank Dr. Audrey Bryan, Dr Michael O'Leary and Dr Patricia Flynn who have also helped me along this journey.

I am greatly indebted to my research participants for giving so generously of their time. This study has benefitted enormously from their critical engagement with the research process, and the honesty and integrity of their views.

As a recipient of research bursaries from the INTO and the Teaching Council of Ireland, I would like to thank both professional bodies for their support of my work.

I would like to thank all of my friends for their support and encouragement during this process, especially Podge for making sure that I engaged with the 'real' world from time to time. I would also like to thank Ben for his invaluable insights and constructive feedback, and all my other fellow students who made B137 such a friendly and welcoming place to study.

I wish to acknowledge my principal Ms Morag McGowan and all my colleagues in St Paul's Ratoath for their support throughout my studies. Their cheerful disposition made combining work and studies an enjoyable experience.

I would like to take time to express my heartfelt thanks to my parents Frank and Noreen, and my siblings Karl and Edwina for their unwavering support throughout. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents for teaching me the importance and value of education, and for that I am deeply indebted.

I want to devote a special word of thanks to my wife Ann. Without your words of motivation and encouragement, I would not have made it to the end and for that I am eternally grateful. Finally, I want to thank our two beautiful girls Doireann and Siún for bringing such joy and happiness into our lives, and I look forward to spending less time in the 'office' and more time in your company.

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## **List of Acronyms**

<b>DEIS</b>	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
<b>DES</b>	Department of Education and Skills
<b>EDC</b>	Educational Disadvantage Committee
<b>HSCLS</b>	Home School Community Liaison Scheme
<b>INTO</b>	Irish National Teachers' Association
<b>ITE</b>	Initial Teacher Education
<b>NAPS</b>	National Anti-Poverty Strategy
<b>NCCA</b>	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
<b>NIPT</b>	National Induction Programme for Teachers
<b>NQT</b>	Newly Qualified Teacher
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>YES</b>	Youth Education System

## **List of Definitions**

**For the purposes of this study, the following definitions apply:**

**Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT):** A teacher in her/his first year of teaching

**Beginning Teacher:** A teacher with less than three years teaching experience

**Early Career Teacher:** A teacher with a minimum of three and a maximum of nine years teaching experience

## **Introduction**

Focusing specifically on teachers in disadvantaged schools, this thesis explores early career teachers' understandings of 'making a difference' and what shape this takes in their day-to-day practice. This study defines 'early career teachers' as those with a minimum of three and a maximum of nine years experience. A high number of primary teachers begin their careers in this setting (Morgan & O'Leary, 2004), making this cohort of teachers an appropriate focus of the study. In light of their role as educators working in communities that are experiencing intense social challenge, the extent to which early career teachers' explicit and tacit understandings of 'making a difference' are concerned with social justice is deemed to be of critical interest.

The study originates out of my own personal concern for education as something that is relational in nature and transformative in potential. I also hold the view that teachers are active agents who have relative autonomy, and thus have the capacity to mediate and mitigate systemic constraints and effect change. In equal measure, I also acknowledge that each teacher's professional situation and context has its own particularities and idiosyncrasies which affect what is both possible and practical.

While this study confines the exploration of the question of 'making a difference' to the educational space, it also acknowledges that education is but one of the many institutions and processes concerned with, and related to the development of the human being. Within this understanding, it is important not to over state the role teachers and the education system as a whole can play in a project of social transformation. As Baker,

Lynch, Cantillon, and Walsh (2004) state: “We cannot expect equality in education without progress towards equality in the economic, cultural, political and affective systems in which it is embedded” (p 168)

This investigation is carried out in a context of unprecedented change and flux in the Irish primary education system, which has presented teachers with significant opportunities and challenges. In the past decade schools and classrooms across the country have undergone exponential change in terms of pupil diversity (Conway & Sloane, 2005, Irish National Teachers’ Organisation [INTO], 2004, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 1999). There has also been a large increase in the number of special educational needs children in mainstream schools (Stevens & O’Moore, 2009, Ware et al, 2009). The ever widening gap that exists between the privileged and marginalised sections of Irish society continues to pose challenges for teachers, particularly for those working in communities experiencing intense social-economic difficulties and the attendant social problems.

Fuelled by concerns around ‘international competitiveness’, Irish teachers are also coming under increasing pressure to orient their practices towards satisfying the exigencies of accountability and performativity (Conway & Murphy, 2013, Ó Breacháin & O’Toole, 2013). Teachers working in designated disadvantaged schools, and especially those at the early stages of their careers, are particularly affected by pressures emanating from the rigorous testing regime that operates in these schools (Kitching, 2010a).

In response to this new environment, the majority of research on teachers' work in disadvantaged schools has been traditional quantitative research based on test results and measuring student achievement. While there has been little recent research into teacher effectiveness in Ireland, internationally this field of research has also sought to frame the teaching experience in terms of 'what works'. Consequently, the voices and the lived experiences of teachers have received little attention from researchers and policymakers, and are under threat of being 'washed out' by the performance, efficiency and standards discourse. This study attempts to address this research gap by giving full legitimacy to the lived experiences of teachers as human beings. By shining a light on their identity, on the 'core' of their being, and the moral purposes of the teacher, the study acts as a counter narrative to the prevailing discourse of efficiency that seeks to position and evaluate teachers exclusively in terms of their technical knowledge and proficiency (Kelchtermans, 2011).

The life worlds of teachers in the early stages of their careers have become a topic of interest to Irish researchers in recent times. This research has focused exclusively on teachers in the first five years of teachers' professional lives (Kitching, 2009, Kitching, Morgan, & O'Leary, 2009; Morgan, 2011, Morgan & Kitching, 2007, Morgan & O'Leary, 2004, Morgan, Ludlow, Kitching, O'Leary, & Clarke, 2010). Early career teachers' job satisfaction, motivation, resilience and self-efficacy have been the concern of these psychologically framed studies. Within this research context, this study attempts to address the gap in our understandings of Irish early career teachers' life worlds by looking specifically at teachers with between three and nine years teaching.

experience. The critical socio-cultural perspective adopted in this study allows for the development of new understandings around the role teachers' personal histories play in teacher identity formation at a stage in their professional lives during which significant identity growth and change has been found to occur (Day et al , 2006, Huberman, 1989)

In order to understand and interpret the meanings of 'making a difference', I draw on the works of critical educators, critical pedagogy and sociology, equality perspectives, and the policy discourse on educational disadvantage. A general criticism of some elements of the critical pedagogy and sociology discourse has been the over emphasis it can place on the discursive (Apple, 2011). Apple's call for critical pedagogy to return to its roots and ground its work in the "gritty materialities of daily life" (p. 41) resonated with me as both a teacher and researcher. Rather than explore the phenomenon from a theoretical or conceptual perspective, the study adopts a phenomenological approach which focuses on the tangible, in terms of teachers' daily practice and praxis. In this way, both researcher and researched are afforded an opportunity to make sense of the phenomenon directly and immediately. It is from this position of shared understanding and meaning making, that the 'why' of these practices can be explored through teachers' stories of becoming and being teacher. Rather than uncritically describe teachers' subjective experiences of 'making a difference', the expressed aim of the research is to critically analyse their stories of teaching in relation to the discourse on social justice and transformation in education, and the role teachers can play in this project. In this way, new understandings and meanings can be generated that can further inform this discussion.

In Chapter One, an analysis of the policy on educational disadvantage is provided. Particular consideration is given to the prevailing deficit and equality of opportunity understandings of educational inequality that underpin policy in this area, and their implications for teachers' practice. In order to unpack the political and power relations that are at work in policy making in the Irish context, the role the 'partnership' policy model has played in perpetuating a consensual view of the social order is discussed. Within this context, the chapter explores how the unchecked influence of essentialist and meritocratic ideals, and regimes of performativity and efficiency have contributed to the narrow focus of educational reform in designated disadvantaged schools. The chapter concludes with an examination of the role that the continuum of teacher education plays in preparing teachers to commence their careers in designated disadvantaged schools.

In the second chapter, the writings of major critical educators are discussed. In particular, the Neo-Marxist perspective espoused by Freire and Gramsci is considered in terms of its ability to uncover some of the subtle considerations that need to be identified if a shared vision of social justice is to be generated and promoted in schools serving marginalised communities. The chapter discusses the propensity for a culture of undisputed consensualism to create a static vision of reality, and to 'depoliticise' teachers' pedagogies and practices. Ways in which the classroom context can be repoliticised are investigated, with particular consideration given to the role a dialogic, caring moral praxis can play in this process. Key school factors that support early career teachers' development and implementation of a praxis for social justice are also considered.



The literature on teacher identity and critical sociology is explored in Chapter Three. This chapter focuses on the role of critical sociology in driving teachers' practice, and the importance of exploring teacher identity particularly in the early stages of teachers' careers. The influence liberal theory, and ideologies of control, efficiency and performativity have on teachers' identity development is examined. Particular consideration is given to the impact these ideological influences are having on teachers' understandings of 'making a difference'. The chapter is also concerned with identifying ways in which teacher identity could be explored in the fullest way. Bourdieu's (1972) concept of habitus, and the articulation of the stories that teachers live by, are identified as insightful ways of exploring the influence that culture exerts on teachers' personal and professional identity formation. The capability of teachers to construct an identity that can be agentic and that can confront the demands of transformative change is also discussed. It is argued that the socially dependent nature of identity development, and its capability to be reconstructed (Flores & Day, 2006) offer exciting possibilities in this regard.

The research approach and methodology are outlined and discussed in Chapter Four. The design of the research is explained in-depth. Chapter Four includes a discussion of the appropriateness of the phenomenological approach and the narrative life history methodology adopted for the research. In the process a rationale is provided for the study's concern with giving voice to the lived experiences of early career teachers working in designated disadvantaged schools. The pilot study and the selection of the participant and school sample are outlined. The reasons for drawing participants from

the two bands of designated disadvantaged schools are discussed in the context of the study's interest in giving a clear picture of contextual influences on teachers' practice and meaning making. The methods of analysis for the life history interview data are described and ethical considerations are discussed.

Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight present the research findings. Chapter Five is descriptive of the pre-service experiences of participants and is concerned with identifying the various factors that influence the development of a teaching identity that is concerned with 'making a difference' in relation to issues of social justice. The various pathways that participants travelled on their journey to becoming qualified primary school teachers are outlined in-depth. In order to generate understandings around the development of teachers' embryonic and idealised teacher identities, participants' general socialisation in the home, school, and local community is examined. Close scrutiny is paid to the influence of social class and background in this analysis. The factors influencing their decision to commence their teaching careers in DEIS schools are also discussed. The level of engagement that participants had with working class communities in their youth, and during the course of initial teacher education (ITE), is identified as a central factor mediating attitudes towards working in marginalised communities.

The following chapter, Chapter Six is descriptive of participants' understandings of 'making a difference' and what shape this takes in their day-to-day practice. In particular, participants' commitment to a justice praxis is explored. Four dimensions to

this holistic praxis were identified from the data liberating pedagogies that are ‘connected’ with students’ life experiences, a devolved, power sharing approach to classroom management, an ethic of care, and working with and valuing diversity. The level and nature of participants’ engagement with each of these individual dimensions are examined, prior to a discussion on what these cumulative findings mean in terms of participants’ understandings of ‘making a difference’.

Chapter Seven examines the underlying ideologies that influence the pedagogies and practices of participants, and assesses their impact on the way participants interpret and define their professional role. In this regard, participants’ perceptions of ‘ability and intelligence’, and their level of engagement with, and responsiveness to discourses and ideologies of control and performativity are examined. The interaction between the named ideological influences and the cultural forces at play in the three school sites is of particular interest here. The chapter also investigates the role institutionally and personally circumscribed understandings of the teaching role have on participants’ practices in relation to the themes of diversity and care.

The level of ideological (dis)harmony between participants’ pedagogical approach, and the nature of their professional engagement with parents is a central concern of Chapter Eight. In the teachers’ narratives their attitudes towards parents is viewed as a signifier of their willingness and capacity to incorporate a vision of social justice into their understanding of ‘making a difference’. Considered a prerequisite for the growth of transformative teacher agency in this area of practice, teacher awareness of the power

dynamics that influence the teacher-parent relationship is foregrounded. The level of connectivity between this awareness and their motivation to democratise and radicalise this relationship dynamic is investigated.

In Chapter Nine, the study's empirical findings are integrated with concepts drawn from critical educator and sociology discourses, equality perspectives, and teacher identity literatures. Two distinct and contradictory views of 'making a difference' articulated in participants' understandings of the term are outlined and discussed. The first view was concerned with working towards sameness in the name of equality and making a difference. In response to academic and policy demands, this view of 'making a difference' was characterised by pedagogies of sameness and understandings of equality as sameness. The second view was underpinned by a caring ethic that characterised their educational relationships, and was in tension with these pedagogies and practices of sameness.

Conclusions are drawn in Chapter Nine. Drawing together the discourses from the critical educators, critical pedagogy and sociology, equality perspectives, and the findings of the research, in this chapter I conclude that as a concept 'making a difference' is complex, and that variation in situations in which it is produced and articulated means that it is best understood as a context, career-stage and habitus specific idea. Like the guiding narratives that teachers live by, these idiosyncratic and in many cases contradictory articulations are developed over time, and in that sense are fluid and relational. Significantly, they are also capable of evolution and change. Through the

development and accumulation of social, political and intellectual capitals, those participants with greater life and professional experience were empowered to plot a less certain, alternative pedagogical trajectory to the one followed by their less experienced counterparts

Findings also suggest that teachers' understandings of 'making a difference' are also capable of solidifying over time, with positive and negative implications for the students they teach. In order for teachers to mediate the macro and meso (institutional) level discourses of performativity and efficiency that are found to be 'pulling' many of them towards more instrumental types of practices, and (re)engage in more liberating forms of praxis, it is concluded that teachers both individually and collectively need to re-connect with the notion of education as a political rather than a neutral construct as it is commonly portrayed by the dominant neo-liberal ideology. By re-imagining policy as problem, rather than policy as constraint, strategies of resistance to those aspects of policy that are in conflict with teachers' 'core educational mission' can begin to be individually and collectively discussed and considered. Looking towards the future the role of ITE in developing and enhancing teachers' social and political criticality is considered. The study concludes that it is through engagement with the political, as well as the moral, ethical and emotional dimensions of teaching that teachers can continue to make a significant difference to students' lives.

# **Chapter One**

## **Policy, Practice and Educational Inequality**

### **1.1 Introduction**

In order to provide a contextual backdrop for the educational landscape that early career primary teachers working in a designated disadvantaged setting must navigate, a consideration of the policy terrain is necessary. This chapter focuses exclusively on Irish primary education, and places a sharp focus on the language used in policy, and on the discussion and debate that emanate from these sources. The primary objective of this policy interrogation is to uncover the political and power relations that are at play. This will help to identify the constraints and catalysts within policy that influence early career teachers' perceptions of 'making a difference'. Drawing on the work of Ball (1993b, 1994), a discursive, agentic approach to policy analysis is adopted. It is one which assumes that policy is typified by multiple meanings reflecting the complex engagement by various actors at various levels of the system and considers the position of early career teachers in relation to 'disadvantaged' policy and discourse.

The chapter is in four parts and concentrates exclusively on Irish primary education. First, a consideration of the language and terminology surrounding the policy trajectory of educational disadvantage will help to illuminate the power of a consensual perspective that dominates educational policy formation and its articulation. In part two, the 'partnership' approach that has driven Irish educational policy development is

critiqued. The influence these policies, and the technologies of accountability that surround them, have on teaching and learning is the focus of discussion in part three. In part four, the role the teacher education continuum plays in preparing teachers for the challenge of working in designated disadvantaged schools is examined.

## **1.2 Trajectory and Language of Policy Addressing Educational Inequality**

This section critiques the history of policy development in Irish primary education with a particular emphasis on the language and terminology surrounding the policy trajectory of ‘educational disadvantage’ and on the lack of critique and broad consensual adoption of this approach to educational inequality. This policy excavation will also provide a backdrop for Chapter Two which focuses on the influence of consensualism on early career teachers’ practices.

An appropriate place to start this analysis is with the term ‘educational disadvantage’ itself. Derman-Sparks (2002) believes that the dictionary is the logical place to commence this process.

It tells us that disadvantage is a lack of advantage, that as a verb it means to place at a disadvantage or to affect unfavourably, and that there are people, the disadvantaged, who are placed at a disadvantage, particularly with regard to social opportunities (p. 59).

This definition suggests a look at the meaning of advantage. It means “Superior position – the position, state, or circumstance of being ahead of another or of having the better of

him or her” (Derman-Sparks, 2002, p 59) Advantage comes from the French word ‘avant’, meaning before. Therefore the implication is that ‘disadvantage’ is the result of the preceding ‘advantage’.

The process of classification is essentially a political act (Stone, 2002), giving advantage to some and disadvantaging the remainder. The political origins of the term make it impossible to analyse social class inequality in terms of structurally determined disadvantage (Drudy & Lynch, 1993) which has the effect of preventing a more enlightened analysis that has a transformative focus. If one internalises the dictionary definitions and perceives “disadvantages are the leftovers from the table of the advantaging society” (Derman-Sparks, 2002, p 60), then the ability of educators to see people from ‘disadvantaged’ communities as equal partners in the educational process is severely compromised.

Against a backdrop of persistent and deep inequalities, the idea of equality provides the scope and the flexibility to generate an agenda of change (Baker et al , 2004, p 246). From this perspective, and where possible, this study will use the term ‘educational inequality’ instead of ‘educational disadvantage’ in general discourse. The term ‘educational disadvantage’ will be reserved solely to quote its usage in legislation, policy documents and relevant literature, or to reference the study’s participants’ direct usage of the term.



### ***1.2.1 Consensualism – Creating a Sense of Inevitability in Relation to Inequality***

In order to examine the influence a consensual view of the social order is exerting on educational policy formation and articulation, this section traces the development of policy aimed at addressing educational inequality over the past four decades. However, as the focus is on the language of policy and its (hidden) meaning, it is first necessary to discuss the origins and meaning of the term ‘consensualism’

When we suggest that policymakers have adopted a consensual view of the social order, what does this mean? The liberal political assumptions which frame the contexts of access, participation and measurable outcomes structure the Irish education system as a culturally and sociologically undifferentiated whole. Within this understanding, there is widespread agreement within all sections of society on what is in the ‘public interest’ or ‘collective interest’ (Drudy & Lynch, 1993, p. 50). Issues of social class, gender, race and ethnicity are sidelined within this paradigm and even when they are raised they are not analysed as generative forces of action. Drudy and Lynch (1993) claim that the predominance of the consensus model of society among Irish educationalists “is partly a by-product of theoretical blindness” (p. 66). This ambivalence to paradigmatic debate has allowed essentialist and meritocratic ideals to remain largely unchallenged (Baker et al., 2004, Tormey, 2010). Both essentialism (defining the person in terms of fixed or innate talents, defined exclusively in purely intellectual terms) and meritocratic individualism (i.e. ‘IQ and effort = merit, see Young, 1961’) imply that failure or success at school is a function of what the individual is or does, and is the essential mechanism

by which our society accepts the principles of differential rewards (Tovey & Share, 2000)

In defining the overall system as a unified and homogenous whole, the only possible way to structure the understanding of educational inequality is in terms of a model of deficit. Through the representation of the individual in abstract terms, rather than as a structurally located relational being, consensual thinking encourages one to look for educational solutions through changing individuals rather than challenging inequalities that are rooted in the social structures of society (Drudy & Lynch, 1993). Consensualism and the liberal egalitarian principles on which it is based, assumes that major inequalities are inevitable and that the task of society is to make them fair (Baker et al, 2004, p. 33).

It is also an ideology which presents itself as value free but which is in fact inherently political (Tormey, 1999, 2010). By closely examining the ambivalent and deliberately vague language and terminology employed in Irish educational policy over the past four decades, a light can be shone on the role consensualism plays in preserving the dominance of a politically conservative understanding of educational inequality (Tormey, 2010). How this understanding has become spirited into the practical processes of identifying who, and who is not, 'educationally disadvantaged' is also of critical interest.

### ***1.2.2 The Policy Hiatus of the 80s and its Relevance to Today's Ireland***

In order to explore the influence of consensualism and its role in stifling debate and preventing democratic contestation, it is appropriate that an analysis of policy aimed at addressing educational inequality should commence in the 1980s. An economic depression similar to the one we are currently experiencing ushered in a period of policy stagnation in the 1980s. It took over a quarter of a century to progress from the modest goal of 'equality of access' as articulated in the *Investment in Education* report (Government of Ireland, 1965), to the 'equality of participation' ideology espoused in the Green Paper on Education (Government of Ireland, 1992). This policy hiatus prevented concerted debate on educational inequality and contributed to the consolidation of a consensual view of the social order. The paucity of policy development in this period is indicative of the tendency for less attention to be devoted to the marginalised in society in times of economic freefall resulting in the widening of the poverty gap.

### ***1.2.3 Imprecision of Language in Legislation and Policy Documents of the 1990s***

The Green Paper on Education, *Education for a Changing World* (Government of Ireland, 1992) and the White Paper on Education, *Charting our Educational Future* (Government of Ireland, 1995) were the policy documents that laid the foundation for the introduction of the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998), the first real attempt at implementing a legislative framework in Irish education. The imprecise use of language in these policy documents has contributed to the fatalistic perception that educational inequality will always be with us.

A consideration of some of the terminology used in the policy documents highlights the difficulty one has interpreting the primary aims of these documents. The use of two analytically distinct ideas such as 'equity' and 'equality' interchangeably in the Green and White Papers (Government of Ireland, 1992, 1995) is a clear example of the inexactness of the language used in these policies. 'Equity' was the guiding principle in the Green Paper, a principle that is extremely difficult to define. In the Green Paper 'equity' was used primarily in relation to the concept of the aforementioned 'equality of participation'. It should be noted that while this did represent a considerable positive shift toward making educational equality a priority (Drudy & Lynch, 1993), the influence of consensual thinking is apparent. Inherent in such an aim is the understanding that the overall system is an undifferentiated whole, and within such an understanding theories of difference, deficit, and discontinuity dominate (Zappone, 2007, p. 10).

The White Paper (Government of Ireland, 1995) that followed did overtly state that equality was to the forefront of policy debate. It also contained proposals to instigate measures that would be directed specifically towards communities suffering intense social challenge. However, as Zappone (2002) asserts, the suspicion remained that its intention was "to avoid increasing the equality gap, *rather than* an explicit attempt to *reduce* the gap" (p. 10). Although the ability of policy to influence teachers' daily practice is open to conjecture (Ball, 1993b, Stone, 2002), the perception that inequality is something that should be controlled rather than eliminated has obvious consequences.

for early career teachers' ability to imagine a better future for the children under their care

The Education Act's (Government of Ireland, 1998) aim of delivering 'equality of participation' with the addition of necessary supports was presented as the primary means of addressing educational inequality. Although the importance of pluralism, partnership and equality were stressed in the Education Act, the exact nature of this equality framework was not explicitly articulated. Despite envisaging a differentiated delivery of education, the absence of a clear rationale as to how this aspiration was to be implemented weakened the Education Act's ability to embrace an equality focus. This level of imprecision is further evidence of the influence of consensualism acting as an analytical barrier in government policy. Drudy and Lynch (1993) sum up this view up when they state that essentialism "merely provides an ideological façade behind which policy-makers and even practitioners can hide when they wish to avoid public accountability" (p. 60).

#### ***1.2.4 The Silent Politics of Policy Measurement and Target Setting***

In the early 2000s the emphasis swung towards 'equality of benefit or achievement' as a consideration of policymakers. This is reflected in the direct reference to it in the National Development Plan (Government of Ireland, 1999a), the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (Government of Ireland, 2000b), and the Action Plan of the National Forum *Primary Education: Ending Disadvantage, 2002* (Gilligan, 2002). Despite general recognition of the influence of cultural factors and socio-economic factors in the perpetuation of the cycle of disadvantage, the lack of specificity and

alignment of policies, approaches and associated targets reflected the prevailing influence of a flawed analysis of educational inequality (Archer & Shortt, 2003).

Tormey's (2010) case study of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) (Government of Ireland, 1997, 2002a) in the late 1990s and early 2000s, is particularly instructive in terms of unpacking the relationship between targets and dominant understandings of educational disadvantage. This analysis is of critical relevance to current measures aimed at addressing educational inequality, as Tormey (2010) argues that many of the targets set in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (Government of Ireland, 2007b) are little more than 're-heated' versions of the output measures contained in NAPS. In addition, the objectives of the action plan for educational inclusion – *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) (Department of Education and Science/Skills [DES] , 2005)<sup>1</sup> which organises the way in which services, supports and resources are deployed to target educational inequality, are indexed to targets set in NAPS (Travers et al., 2010).

In order to deconstruct the conservative understanding of educational inequality embedded in NAPS (Government of Ireland, 1997, 2002a) and the subsequent policies that it spawned, Tormey (2010) critiques the 'outputs-led' approach to measurement of educational inequality employed in the strategy. The outputs model focuses on setting minimal standards of attainment (such as minimal levels of literacy and numeracy or of attainment in state examinations) and identifying those who do not attain this level as

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<sup>1</sup> The influence of DEIS (DES, 2005) and other recent policy initiatives aimed on addressing educational inequality will be fully discussed in Section 1.4.

being educationally disadvantaged (Tormey, 2010, p. 193). Tormey (2010) outlines its four corollaries, all of which are distinctly political:

1. The model assumes that the test used to determine a successful educational outcome is, in itself, a meaningful measure. As Mac Ruairc (2009) identifies, the bias inherent in standardised tests exist at a fundamental level in favour of middle class students, and that failure to take account of these issues led to what he describes as “an overly crude picture of national attainment patterns and serve only to contribute to the stigmatisation and ghettoisation of children living in marginalised and disadvantaged communities” (p. 47).

2. The model is based on identifying individuals as being ‘disadvantaged’ so that targets and areas for intervention can be set. Here we can clearly see ideas of deficit and difference at play, with the focus on changing the person, the school or community, rather than the broader education or economic system (O’Suillivan, 1999).

3. By setting a minimum standard for measuring inequality, this measure ignores the extent to which educational qualifications are used in the jobs market. In this way, middle class parents’ ability to assert their reproduction advantages in education, through their increased access to and accumulation of economic and social capitals (Ball, 1993a) becomes more evident. Tormey (2010) argues that this corollary operates from a distinctly consensualist perspective through its “fail[ure] to recognise or to challenge unequal economic and power relations in society” (p. 195).



4. An outputs-led model of measurement of educational inequality pays no attention to the experience of those who score above the minimum standard specified. According to Tormey (1999), such an approach does not account for children's potential:

Particularly bright children from poor, unemployed or working-class families who may be underachieving compared to their potential but may be achieving above average compared to other children, are by definition excluded from this working model of educational disadvantage. (p. 34)

Once again, we see evidence of a conservative, political agenda embedded in this model of measurement, as this corollary provides a rationale for limiting numbers of children who are deemed to be experiencing educational inequality, and as a consequence limits the cost to the state.

In summary, these four corollaries in a cumulative sense are embedded in a consensualist political agenda which focuses attention on the individual who is experiencing inequality. In this way, attention is directed away from the structural processes of inequality and the role the education system plays in its perpetuation. The revised NAPS (Government of Ireland, 2002a) is another example of a policy that eschews setting real targets. Despite targeting being a feature of approaches to tackle inequality for some time, it is not reflected in any of the 'key targets' of NAPS (Kellaghan, 2002). Even when targets are set in a supplementary section, the lack of specificity renders the target unachievable. The target to halve the proportion of pupils with serious difficulties by 2006 "fails to specify the present proportion, the age or grade levels of pupils being targeted, or how the target is to be achieved" (Kellaghan, 2002, p.



25). There is obvious irony in the lack of policy specificity in a policy terrain that has witnessed unprecedented growth in the influence of instrumentalism and accountability. What is most striking, however, is the failure of policymakers to make clear the political, consensus driven overtones of their approach.

### **1.3 Power Relations of Policy**

The extent to which the politics of educational inequality is shrouded in consensual silence highlights the importance of critically examining the power relations at play in Irish educational policy development. This section will examine the political and power relations of the 'partnership' approach that has driven Irish educational policy in the last four decades. While a partnership model appears to be the essence of true democratic and inclusive practice, its consistent failure to adequately address the widening inequalities in education points to a suppression of necessary debate on the future of education (Sugrue, 2004; Sugrue & Glesson, 2004).

#### ***1.3.1 Partnerships' Failure to Address Inequalities***

In contrast to the more adversarial, hostile policy environment in other countries, the consensual, partnership framework espoused and practiced in Ireland has been lauded in political circles for its ability to achieve 'shared meanings' (Sugrue, 2004, p.202). However, a partnership based on representation also has the propensity to prioritise consensus building "rather than [engage] in a more open-ended discourse that eschews

power and privilege in favour of educational concerns” (Sugrue & Glesson, 2004, p. 279).

The inexactness of language used in Irish educational policy documents is an expression of this stilted debate. The vague, neutral terminology used in the previously discussed policy discussion documents of the 1990s can be explained by the difficulty the various educational partners had in finding a common working language. A key informant of Sugrue’s (2004) exploration into the power struggles that surrounded the construction of the Revised Primary Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b) claims that a rather general and neutral language was employed in order to keep participants on board. The ability of ambiguity to help to reduce conflict and allow individuals or groups at opposite ends of the political spectrum to support a particular policy is acknowledged in the literature (Maitland, 1995; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer 2002). However, it would seem that the consensual, partnership approach has served to conceal the politics and power relations around schooling in Ireland.

The partnership framework which has created a ‘policy elite’ (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) has resulted in the atomization of decision-making and the further camouflaging of the aforementioned power relations. Atomized decision-making deceptively appears to give everyone an equal opportunity, but can actually serve to reduce the scope for collective action to improve education (Apple, 2004). A concerted, long term focus on addressing the structural causes of inequality in education and society at large is further compromised by the ever changing policy environment. Cultural mechanisms, those

influences in society which determine which demands for policy change are valid matters for political consideration, act as a regulatory force (Earley, 1999) It is these “gatekeepers” (Earley, 1999, p 141) (trade unions, employer organisations, senior civil servants, politicians) that decide which demands will progress to the point where they become issues for policy resolution Thus, what seems inclusive in theory actually excludes marginalised and powerless groups, and does little more than allow vested interests to pursue their own agendas and interests (Sugrue, 2004)

The tendency of sectional interests to focus on short-term goals has also been detrimental to the creation of a shared vision for the future of Irish education Archer’s (2007)<sup>2</sup> critique of the public consultation process that occurred during the course of the Youth Education System (YES) provides an example of this dynamic at play The YES was a process of public consultation on the future of education initiated by the then Minister for Education, Mr Noel Dempsey and a series of public meetings took place during the course of 2004-2005 A final report on the YES process (Kellaghan & McGee, 2005) documented that it proved “difficult, both at meetings and in written submission, to get individuals to shift their perspective from immediate concerns to a longer-term view of the development of the education system” (p 21) Secondly, the deliberate attempts to hear the voices of those not often heard in debates about education was somewhat undermined by the fact that some of the established interest groups used the public meetings to highlight particular sectional interest that they were pursuing with government at that time (Archer, 2007) The tendency of key stakeholders to attach their

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<sup>2</sup> Archer (2007) is an unpublished paper Elements of its discussion on the role of ‘partnership’ and consensus seeking in policy making in Ireland is drawn from Archer (2003)

preferred “meanings” to the latest initiative can often result in minimal “buy in” (Sugrue & Glesson, 2004, p 287) Such tinkering is further evidence of consensualism at work and results in the consolidation of the status quo In light of their position of strength in the curricular field, it is incumbent upon teachers to initiate a more encompassing reform discourse that is not constrained by sectional, hegemonic interests (Sugrue & Glesson, 2004)

### ***1.3.2 The Need for a New Understanding of Partnership***

Extending the policy consultation process is necessary to prevent these hegemonic constraints narrowing policy focus Responsibility for education rests on everyone’s shoulders, not just with policy elites (Sugrue, 2004) Both students and parents who participate in a school that is ‘designated disadvantaged’ need to hear how the system as a whole speaks of their school (Downes & Gilligan, 2007) A consideration of the conflicting views held by the parents and teachers in relation to the major causal factor in the creation of educational inequality reveals the need for greater dialogue In a major survey conducted by the National Forum on Educational Disadvantage (Gilligan, 2002) parents overwhelmingly identified ‘relations of mutual respect’ between children, teachers and parents as a central condition for the child’s performance or completion of learning In contrast, the vast majority of professionals viewed the ‘home environment and parental involvement’ as the prime condition for the optimum educational performance by children These contrasting views can prove divisive if not addressed There is a need for greater dialogue between all the significant educational partners in

order to shift the emphasis from the preoccupation with naming 'disadvantage' to a new approach that focuses on finding solutions

Giving children an opportunity to not only to participate in progressive pedagogies, but to act as decision makers in their own classrooms is a true sign of a democratic and inclusive education. Traditional concepts of children's rights and schooling in Ireland have focused on the rights to education rather than the rights to have a voice within the school system (Devine, 2003). There has been a slow but gradual recognition that students and children can play an important role in all areas of public policy (Archer, 2003, 2007, Walshe, 1999) and is articulated clearly in the National Children's Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2000a). However, despite the rhetoric of student consultation, student participation in policymaking remains often aspirational (Devine, 2004, Walshe, 1999). Travers et al (2010) also note that while children were not included as one of the partners in the consultation process for either the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) or the Primary Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b), there is evidence in these documents of the importance of including children's voices in matters affecting them.

There is a wealth of Irish research that highlights the valuable insights children can give into the life of a school for children with diverse needs (Travers et al , 2010, p 53). Studies including children and young people from a range of special educational needs (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2004, 2006; O'Donnell, 2003, Rose & Shevlin, 2004) and from minority ethnic and minority language groups

(Devine, Kelly, & McNeela, 2004, McDaid, 2009, McGorman & Sugrue, 2007) demonstrate their capacity to inform policy and practice in matters affecting their lives. Through consulting children and placing value on their views, an important message is communicated. The abilities to embrace responsibility and participate in a democratic environment are invaluable life skills that are demonstrated through this process (Zappone, 2007). This message is echoed in Dunne's (2002) call for children to learn the habits of 'responsible citizens'. This epitome of equality involves conversing across difference, debating with respect and forming judgements in the interest of society as well as the self. This discourse will nurture in students a vision of themselves as agents of change, thus "reinforcing the essential foundation of pluralistic and participatory democracy" (Howard, 1999, p. 81).

#### **1.4 DEIS and its Role in Addressing Educational Inequality**

Prior to an examination of the influence the DEIS (DES, 2005) programme is having on teaching and learning in designated disadvantaged schools, the programme's structures and aims will be detailed.

As mentioned earlier, DEIS (DES, 2005) co-ordinates the services, supports and resources that are deployed to target educational inequality in Irish education. Upon its launch in 2005, it went about integrating the then existing eight programmes under a new programme called the School Support Programme. According to DEIS, schools are identified for participation in the School Support Programme through a process of

survey using a number of socio-economic variables<sup>3</sup> Participating schools in DEIS are classified into two bands Where the level of inequality is greatest, urban/town primary schools are classified as participating in Band 1 of DEIS, and the remaining participating urban/town schools are classified as participating in Band 2 of DEIS Primary schools serving rural communities, including towns with populations below 1,500 are included in the rural strand of DEIS All participating schools receive a range of additional resources including additional staffing, funding, access to literacy and numeracy programmes, and assistance with activities such as school planning These schools also have access to the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCLS)

The primary focus of DEIS is on raising literacy and numeracy standards and retention rates in designated disadvantaged schools The focus on literacy and numeracy is largely in response to persistent concerns over the low levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy, for pupils experiencing inequality (Eivers, Shiel, Perkins, & Cosgrove, 2005, Eivers, Shiel, & Shortt, 2005, Weir, Milis, & Ryan, 2002) Recent evaluation reports on the DEIS programme highlight significant improvements in the area of literacy, and to a lesser extent in mathematics, as measured in test scores (Inspectorate of DES, 2011, Weir & Denner, 2013) Promoted by the poorer than usual performance of Irish 15-year-olds in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2009b), the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 (DES, 2011) was published Literacy and

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<sup>3</sup> The socio-economic variables employed are unemployment, the percentage of local authority accommodation, lone parenthood, Travellers, large families (five or more children), and pupils eligible for free books (DES, 2005)

numeracy in schools participating in DEIS is given significant attention in the Strategy. Since its introduction, the emphasis on literacy and numeracy attainment has intensified in designated disadvantaged schools.

#### ***1.4.1 Narrow Focus on Literacy and Numeracy***

Reflecting the legislative and policy framework and its embeddedness in a thesis of consensualism and deficit, DEIS is exclusively concerned with changing the student and the school, rather than challenging unequal economic and power relations in society. The belief that given enough concerted support to adapt and change, the student experiencing educational inequality can avail of the opportunities that the system offers reflects this deficit orientated thinking (Archer & Leathwood, 2003). Evidence of a prioritisation of economic outcomes is also strikingly evident in DEIS. Its basic principles are drawn from the knowledge economy, national social partnership agreements and NAPS, which as discussed earlier, unproblematically equates social progression with economic progression (Kitching, 2010a). Consequently, the intervention programmes that have been put in place in schools have a narrow focus on the raising of test scores or achievement levels. The HSCLS is the only exception to this pattern, where there is a focus on the improvement of relationships between parent and child and parent and school.

The approaches taken to literacy development require deconstruction. While promoting literacy and numeracy is an important aim of Irish educational policy, there is increasing concern that it is occurring at the expense of the holistic and constructivist



ideals for which the Irish primary curriculum is lauded for (Coolahan, 2011, Downes, 2003) The emphasis that these approaches place on verbal mathematical intelligences has the capacity to erode the perception of the inherent value of diverse forms of intelligences (Gardner, 1983, Sternberg, 1995) and the curricular areas that attend to their development The contradictory sentiment regarding narrowing of curriculum evident in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011) does little to allay these concerns The propensity for the Strategy to communicate ‘mixed messages’ is evident in the following example described by Ó Breacháin and O’Toole (2013)

While the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy maintains that ‘placing a strong focus in schools on the development and monitoring of students’ literacy and numeracy skills is not incompatible with a broad and balanced curriculum’ (DES, 2011, p 44), it emphasises the need ‘to re-prioritise spending away from *desirable but ultimately less important* activities’ (DES, 2011, p 15, emphasis added) It also indicates that the curriculum cannot include everything that might be desirable (p 401)

The way the teaching of literacy is conceptualised in DEIS (DES, 2005) and the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy is also problematic Kitching (2010a, p 222) argues that DEIS relies heavily on depoliticised, cognitive psychological approaches to literacy which largely fail to acknowledge, or indeed address socio-cultural practice An ambiguous and at times narrow understanding of the term ‘literacy’ is also evident in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy While the Strategy purports to present a broad, non-utilitarian definition of ‘literacy’, the replacement of ‘literacy’ with the word ‘reading’ in its aims indicates its concern with performance on national and international

standardised tests (Ó Breacháin & O'Toole, 2013) Such narrowly defined conceptualisations of literacy and numeracy further undermines the holistic nature of the primary curriculum, and represent a negative development for the Irish educational system and Irish children

#### *1.4.2 Testing and Performativity*

In Ireland, as elsewhere, the scope, intensity and intent of accountability and performativity have increased significantly in recent years (Conway & Murphy, 2013) This section will examine the origins of this performance and audit culture, and assess the impact it has on teaching and learning in DEIS schools

Neo-liberalism and its pervasive influence on the expansion and design of accountability systems worldwide (Apple, 2004, Singh, Kenway, & Apple, 2005) has gained an increasing foot-hold in the Irish context<sup>4</sup> The attainment of results, high stakes consequences and the related role of market competition are characteristic of this neo-liberal worldview (Cochran-Smith, Piazza, & Power, 2013) The recent economic downturn, the 'bad news' from the PISA results, and the strategic leadership in terms of a reforming Minister (Looney, 2012) provided the conditions for what Conway and Murphy (2013) term 'the rising tide' of new accountabilities in teaching and teacher education in Ireland Mirroring the characteristics of the global systems, these new accountabilities are defined by their emphasis on standardisation, a narrow focus on literacy and numeracy and higher stakes accountability (Conway & Murphy, 2013)

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 3 for a more detailed analysis of the influence of neo-liberalism on teacher identity and practice

The exact level at which the stakes have been set are not fully clear, and the impact these new accountabilities will have on teaching and learning in the primary system as a whole (Conway & Murphy, 2013). However, it is reasonable to suggest that they will heighten attentiveness towards the processes of testing in Irish primary schools. In relation to DEIS schools, new policies and discourses of performativity and accountability only add to the already rigorous testing regime that the DEIS programme obliges participating schools to implement. Indeed, as Kitching (2010a) notes, such rigorous testing is not required in other 'advantaged' schools, and claims that this high level of 'surveillance' echoes the US-based 'No Child Left Untested' policies (p. 222). Diamond and Spillane's (2004) US-based research found that designated disadvantaged schools are likely to interpret mandated reporting of students' test scores as particularly high stakes. The current economic climate and the constant threat of cuts that hang over DEIS schools raises the stakes further. Mac Ruairc (2009, p. 48) also reports that the recent link between standardised testing and the allocation of additional supports for special educational provision has added to the currency of testing throughout the system (DES, 2000). The capacity for the testing process to be self-defeating in terms of its aim of raising standards is alluded to by Travers et al. (2010) who reports that some schools report a lack of certainty as to how their DEIS status will be reassessed if their test scores show evidence of improvement.

In terms of teaching and learning, there are many potential negative outcomes of a focus on standardised testing. According to Mac Ruairc (2009) these negative consequences include a 'teach to test' culture in schools (Anagnostopoulos, 2005, Lam

& Bordignon, 2001, McNeil, 2000), the proliferation of inadequate pedagogy (McNeil, 2000) and the avoidance of risk taking and innovative practice (Williams & Ryan, 2000). Considering the wealth of Irish research that points to the greater tendency of teachers in designated disadvantaged schools to orient their practices towards teaching to the 'basics' with less innovative and cognitively challenging approaches (Devine 2011, Devine, Fahie, & McGillicuddy, 2013, Lynch & Lodge, 2002, Smyth, 1999, Smyth & Calvert, 2011), it is reasonable to assume that the focus on testing will only exacerbate these problems. Instead, there is a need to refocus attention on the broad scope of assessment embedded in the Primary Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b) and the NCCA (2005a) guidelines on assessment, and its emphasis on ensuring a balance of practice in schools between assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning. Significantly, in light of the previous discussion in Section 1.2.4 on the significant bias against working class and ethnic minority students present in standardised tests, such a broad and holistic approach to assessment has the capacity to support and assess the learning of all students irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity or class (Mac Ruairc, 2009, p. 48).

## **1.5 Countering Consensual Policy through Practice**

This concluding section considers the need for pre-service and early career teachers to reflect upon their own guiding assumptions on educational inequality. The role of ITE in developing and enhancing teachers' social and political criticality is considered.

### ***1.5.1 The Importance of Broad Critical Reflection***

The effectiveness of pre-service teacher education as a means of preparing student teachers for the classroom has received much critical attention both nationally and internationally (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005, Government of Ireland, 2002b, Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). A distinctly common feature of such inquiries is the ineffectiveness of ITE due to the evaluated incongruity between the pre-service experience and their experiences of teaching as a newly qualified teacher (NQT) (Wideen et al., 1998). In particular, the traditional 'theory-to-practice' approach which was often exemplified by teacher education has received much criticism in the literature (Clandinin, 1995, Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005, Korthagen, 2012, Wideen et al., 1998, Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). The tendency for the theories presented to teachers during ITE to be 'washed out' as soon as they start teaching (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981), has particular relevance to the Irish context where a number of reports have foregrounded a skills based orientation to the development of NQTs' professional competence (Inspectorate of DES, 2005a, Killeavy & Murphy, 2006). The tendency of NQTs to view their college-based and school-based experiences as being

distinct and separate learning experiences (Churchill & Walkington, 2002) poses significant challenges for teacher education

The debate that preceded the recent reconceptualisation of Irish teacher education placed these concerns to the forefront of its deliberations (see Waldron, Smith, Fitzpatrick, & Dooley, 2012). In order to bridge the gap between theory and practice, an increased focus on the critically reflective practitioner has emerged in the newly expanded primary teacher education programmes. This orientation also speaks to Irish and international research which points to the importance of early career teachers engaging in critically reflective practice (Earley & Kinder, 1994, Inspectorate of DES, 2005a, Villani, 2002). While the importance of teacher reflection is indisputable, the nature of the reflection requires critical examination.

The development of 'knowledge for practice' (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) has been of significant influence in terms of how teacher reflection is conceptualised in the Irish context (NCCA, 2005a). This approach has been found to be particularly effective in terms of helping student teachers develop a solid knowledge base and mastery of a broad range of teaching skills (Korthagen, 2001). In the context of this study, and its focus on early career teachers' capacity to make a difference in social justice terms, it is somewhat limiting. The need to broaden and deepen the content of teacher reflection beyond the technical and instrumental concerns that most often dominate has become an increasing concern (Hargreaves, 1995, Kelchtermans, 2009, 2011, Korthagen, 2004, 2012). While the recent increased focus on developing student teachers' reflexivity is a

positive step, there is a need for ITE to devote further time and resources to the development of student teachers' appreciation of the moral, political, social and emotional dimensions to teaching and teacher reflection (Hargreaves, 1995, Kelchtermans, 2009, 2011, O'Brien, 2012) Such a broad approach also has the capacity to help Irish student teachers to probe their idealised identities, which continue to partially reflect traditional constructions of teacher identity (Furlong, 2012, Sugrue, 1996) <sup>5</sup>

### ***1.5.2 Preparing Teachers for the Challenge of Working in DEIS Schools***

Irish research has pointed to the need for a greater emphasis to be placed on preparing teachers for the challenge of teaching in designated disadvantaged schools (Inspectorate of DES, 2005b) A number of studies have clearly indicated that NQTs feel ill prepared to commence their careers in a designated disadvantaged school (Inspectorate of DES, 2005a, Tormey, Ryan, & Dooley, 2003) Tormey et al 's (2003) study into the views of graduates of the B Ed course in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick is particularly insightful in terms of identifying the specific areas of ITE that they felt contributed to their feeling of unpreparedness The need for greater 'discussion and debate surrounding problems of disadvantage', 'description of the range of educational disadvantage initiatives available' and 'questioning of your assumptions and expectations regarding disadvantage' were identified by graduates as requiring greater levels of treatment in ITE

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<sup>5</sup> For a more comprehensive treatment of this topic see Chapter 3, Section 3.5.2

This concern is also reflected in the identification by the working group on primary pre-service teacher education (Government of Ireland, 2002b) and the Educational Disadvantage Committee (EDC, 2004) of the need for all teacher education programmes to offer modules dealing explicitly with the issue of teaching in disadvantaged settings. While these bodies provide little detail as to how ITE should engage with such a project of change, the EDC (2004) did recommend that student teachers have the opportunity of conducting at least one practicum in the ‘disadvantaged’ setting (p 13). The homogenous middle class population of pre-service primary teachers (Drudy, Martin, Woods, & O’Flynn, 2005) and the lack of pre-service engagement they have with working class and ethnically diverse populations (Leavy, 2005), heightens the need for pre-service teachers to gain experience of working and engaging with people living and working in areas experiencing intense social challenge. The recent reconceptualisation of the school placement experience offers exciting opportunities in this regard. Not only does it allow for student teachers to better integrate theory and practice through collaborative professional practice and enquiry-based learning, it also encourages them to participate actively in school life, including supported engagement with parents and other professionals working in the community (Ní Áingléis, Murphy, & Ruane, 2012, Teaching Council of Ireland, 2013). However, a significant weakness of the new school placement programme is its failure to make school placements in marginalised communities an integral and mandatory part of the process.



### ***1.5.3 Progression to a Continuum of Support Model***

It has been a long stated aim of government policy that the ‘3I’s’ of policy – initial, induction and in-service education should underpin a teaching career (Coolahan, 2003). The current National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT), operating at both primary and post-primary level, is a very welcome departure and is the first concerted attempt to provide necessary support to NQTs. The role of the in-school mentor is integral to the induction experience. An evaluation of the pilot phase of the project revealed that teachers who had experienced induction were more committed to the profession and more capable of moving beyond initial concerns with classroom management problems to dealing with instructional and curricular issues (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006). It should also be noted that this evaluation focused on general findings and did not make specific reference to participating NQTs and mentors in designated disadvantaged schools.<sup>6</sup> This adds further credence to the argument that the experiences of new teachers working in disadvantaged schools is a neglected research topic in the Irish context. While it has been established that certain kinds of supports including affording new teachers greater autonomy, providing administrative supports and mentoring have beneficial outcomes in terms of teacher retention (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), a consideration of the factors that motivate NQTs to act as agents of social change, could potentially enhance efforts to retain motivated socially agentive teachers.

Similar to the concerted calls to introduce a national induction programme, the need for greater provision of professional development for teachers working in disadvantaged

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<sup>6</sup> An in-depth exploration of the role of the mentor in a designated disadvantaged school is provided in Chapter 2, Section 2.6.1

schools has also been continuously highlighted (EDC, 2004, Inspectorate of DES 2005b) The introduction of a sabbatical year for teachers designed to encourage more of these teachers to engage in post graduate studies have been recommended by the EDC (2004) The need to not only up skill teachers working in such demanding roles but also to provide space for them to reflect and engage in a self renewal process will reap the rewards over the course of their careers

## **1.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has illuminated the propensity of a consensual view of the social order, and the partnership model that reinforces it, to limit debate in the interests of avoiding conflict over basic values around inequality and education A culture of silence has suppressed debate on the politically conservative understanding of educational inequality that dominates the policy discourse This has resulted in many legislative acts designed to address educational inequality falling dramatically short of their promises The political origin of all educational reform is agreed by policy analysts (Earley, 1999, Stone, 2002, Tyack & Cuban, 1995) Stone (2002) argues that secrecy is an integral part of the political world and policies about revelation and withholding are a common object of struggle However, the consensual veil allows the market orientated forces to continue to dominate social and education policy and to intensify societal inequalities predominantly based along lines of class division It is therefore apparent that the existing power relations and the rhetoric of consultative decision-making needs to be challenged if the structural causes of educational inequality are to be eradicated

In the current economic, social and policy context, the challenge for early career teachers to play an agentic role in a project of social transformation is a considerable, but not insurmountable one. As discussed in the chapter that follows, central to this process is the need for educators to re-image education as a political process, and in this way shatter 'the phoney silence' of consensualism that threatens to 'depoliticise' (Freire, 1996, Shor & Freire, 1987) and neutralise more transformative visions of education.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Critical Perspectives on Teaching and Learning**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

“If you want to understand ideology at work in schools, look as much at the concrete day to day curricular and pedagogic life” (Apple, 1982a , p 249) Ideologies are not only global sets of interests imposed on one group by another, they are embodied by our commonsense meanings and practices (Williams, 1977) These meanings and practices provide us with an insight into the way liberal theory acts as a smoke screen, hiding the unjust realities that exist in our educational system The previous chapter highlighted the propensity of a consensual view of the social order to limit debate in the policy sphere Drawing on the works of Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci and critical educational studies in general, this chapter critically examines the influence consensualism is exerting on teaching and learning In the process, some of the factors that are making it even more difficult to imagine education as a transformative praxis will be illuminated and critiqued

One of the appealing aspects of both Freire and Gramsci’s work is that they offer alternatives to teachers (Q1, 1997) Merely grumbling over what one considers an unjust system is not sufficient There is a need to empower teachers and students to fight the glaring inequalities that persist in the educational system These alternative mandates have a dual focus “to demystify the old system of values; and in the process propose a

new system of values” (Kearney, 1994, p 175) This process involves identifying not only ways of negating an authoritarian ideology that has pervaded the system, but also analyse ways of creating liberating alternatives Central to this process is the need to ‘repoliticise’ education The increased influence of market forces has weakened the concept of democracy as a political concept (Apple, 2005) This market driven ideology has helped to create a climate of subordination to the meritocratic ideals in education that unjustly discriminate against lower socio-economic groups (Apple, 2005)<sup>7</sup> This dialogical process can be made more productive if people’s life histories and cultural heritage are used as starting points for discussion An appreciation of the dialectical relationship between human beings and their concrete historical and cultural reality is a central tenet running through this chapter Critical reflection by teachers and students on this dialectical relationship can foster not only action, but also active intervention into reality (Freire, 1972)

The chapter is in five parts First, the factors inhibiting the realisation of a liberating praxis will be explored Second, teachers’ role in the perpetuation of this static vision of reality is examined The capacity of didactic teaching methods to alienate and ‘depoliticise’ students is illuminated In part three, the writings of the critical educators are discussed In particular, the Neo-Marxist perspective espoused by Freire and Gramsci is considered in terms of its ability to uncover some of the subtle considerations that need to be identified if a shared vision of social justice is to be generated and

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<sup>7</sup> Meritocracy is based on the belief that people with superior talents and abilities deserve greater privileges and power than ordinary people - a view that finds expression throughout society, and is particularly prevalent in the Irish educational system (Baker et al , 2004) See Section 2.2.3 for a full deconstruction of the term and its effects on schooling

promoted in schools serving marginalised communities. The role an ethic of care can play in the development of a dialogical classroom is outlined in part four. Finally, in part five, the school factors that can support and encourage early career teachers to engage in more liberating kinds of pedagogies are highlighted.

## **2.2 A Static Vision of Reality and its Role in the Depoliticisation Process**

This section explores the central role the formal corpus of school knowledge plays in the creation and recreation of hegemonic control by the dominant classes. The pre-eminence given to a narrow definition of intelligence is critically examined in terms of its effect on what is taught and valued in schools. It is argued that there is a need to challenge the consensual thinking surrounding the definition of knowledge and intelligence, and the static vision of reality that it portrays.

### **2.2.1 *'Legitimate'/'High Status' Knowledge***

The perception of knowledge as a neutral, psychological 'artifact' (Apple, 1979, p 16) has contributed to the depoliticisation of the culture that schools produce. An interrogation of the influence this restrictive interpretation of knowledge has on teaching practices is required. In order to uncover the causal factors of this constraining influence, the definition of 'legitimate' knowledge needs to be problematised. The discussion needs to be broadened from one that views it as an analytical or psychological problem to one that views it as an ideological one, connected to the larger distribution of goods and services in a society (Apple, 1979). This section will explore

how the formal corpus of school knowledge is central to the creation and recreation of hegemonic control by the dominant classes (Gramsci, 1971) Particular attention is given to understanding why and how particular aspects of the collective culture are presented in schools as objective, factual knowledge (Apple, 1979)

I will start this process by looking at the sources of knowledge production Knowledge is now produced at some distance from the classroom context (Shor & Freire, 1987) The increased specialisation of research, invariably conducted by a ‘scientist’/‘theorist’, has resulted in a deeper knowledge of the component of the system under research However, it is arguable how much this specialisation of research can teach us about the totality of the educational experience A static conception of knowledge inhibits students’ ability to pose and solve problems, and presents knowledge creation and recreation as the preserve of the educationally privileged ‘experts’ In order to challenge this intangible, abstract perception of knowledge that only serves to stifle both teachers’ and students’ natural inquisitiveness, there needs to be a ‘democratisation’ of knowledge creation Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) refer to this type of knowledge creation as ‘knowledge *for* practice’ It is “what teachers come to understand as they reflect on their practice, and is situated in their own classrooms It is practical knowledge – individual knowledge, stimulated by teachers’ own questions about their own classrooms” (Mc Laughlin, 2002, p 96) As discussed in Chapter One, ‘knowledge for practice’ is already positively influencing assessment policy in the primary sector (NCCA, 2005a) However, it is important that this framework for knowledge production retains a broad and inclusive focus, and does not become

consumed by technical, instrumental concerns (Kelchtermans, 2011) In this way, it can be built upon to create a classroom culture where students and teachers join collaboratively to ask pertinent questions about knowledge set in their own classroom context Educator and student assume the mantle of ‘co-investigators’ (Freire, 1996) This approach sees concepts as “flexible strategies which develop from one historical tradition to another as *willed* human responses to the changing social environment” (Kearney, 1994, p 181), not formal structures in a self-contained system that are impenetrable to the masses

The close connection between the economy and the structure of school knowledge acts as a significant barrier to the aforementioned ‘democratisation’ of knowledge The higher status bestowed upon scientific and technical talk in advanced industrial countries highlights the strength of this connection (Apple, 2005) There has been strong resistance to make ‘low status’ knowledge (knowledge concerning the emotional and social development of children) claims equal The increasingly influential ‘performance culture’ that was discussed in Chapter One, and its unrelenting emphasis on the attainment of ultimate competitiveness, has resulted in civic values being replaced with economic objectives (Kell, 2005) Educational practices that are centred on the emotional and ethical development of a child do not fit neatly into an input-output model, and as a consequence, become sidelined in this paradigm In contrast, ‘high status’ knowledge is perceived to be macro-economically beneficial owing to its discrete nature and relatively stable structures (Apple, 1979, p 38)



### *2.2.2 Narrow Definition of Intelligence*

As discussed in Chapter One, this hierarchy of knowledge is reflected in the pre-eminence given to the verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences in recent Irish educational policies and initiatives (DES, 2005, 2011). The production lines of 'high status knowledge' are kept running smoothly through the aggressive promotion of such a narrow definition of intelligence. Psychometricians such as Spearman (1927) envisaged intelligence to be primarily unitary, quite heritable, correlate with IQ and be somewhat predicative of school performance. The pervasive influence of 'deficit' thinking ensures that this corrosive belief still afflicts the system (Baker et al., 2004). This sedentary perception of intelligence echoes the static vision of knowledge outlined in the preceding section. For learners whose intelligence strengths lie outside the logical-mathematical and verbal-linguistic realm, inequality is created in relation to access to particular subjects and courses of study, and the capacity to participate and benefit from schooling across the system as a whole (Baker et al., 2004).

In more recent times, the diversity of intelligence has been recognised (Gardner 1983; Sternberg, 1985). These named theorists argue vociferously against the dominant and flawed 'one cap fits all' philosophy that views intelligence as fixed and predetermined. Instead, they seek to understand the mental processes involved in tasks requiring intelligence. Gardner's (1983, 1999) theory of multiple intelligences for example, has argued that there are at least eight distinct but interconnected intelligences.<sup>8</sup> O'Brien (2008) describes Gardner's theory as one "that focuses on the ability to solve problems

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<sup>8</sup> Gardner (1983, 1999) has identified at least eight core intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist.

and create products that are of value in a given culture, thus enabling students to demonstrate their intelligence in practical, not just academic ways” (p 107) Gardner (1983) and Sternberg’s (1985) work also highlights the importance of the interpersonal intelligences and the central role they play in facilitating our understandings of self, others and the affective life (O’Brien, 2011a) Within these understandings, educators can begin to challenge the way in which personal and other diverse forms of intelligence have been marginalised and made subordinate to cognition and competition

### ***2.2.3 Continued Dominance of Meritocratic Ideals***

Although the Revised Primary Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b) places a significant emphasis on experiential learning, the ever widening schism between those constructivist ideals and the exam driven second level education points to the continued dominance of meritocratic ideals encapsulated in terminal exams Meritocracy implies competition for advantage is the governing cultural norm within the educational field (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, Lynch, 1989) The intensity of this competition has steadily increased as qualifications play an ever increasing role in determining the life chances of students (Baker et al , 2004, Bourdieu, 1984) This increased competition has meant that the possession of economic capital has assumed even greater importance in education, as it can be institutionalised through its conversion to educationally relevant social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) It is apparent that those who are best resourced financially are best placed to succeed educationally, while those who lack these resources will experience relative educational failure (Baker et al , 2004, Ball, 1993a) The advent of the new emphasis on experiential, hands on learning, coupled with the

introduction of alternative Leaving Certificate programmes have gone some way to addressing this gap between the aforementioned constructivist ideals of the Revised Primary Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b) and the exams driven second level model. However, the lack of value given to these alternative programmes in relation to entry to third level education highlights the continued primacy given to meritocratic ideals embodied in academic subjects.

### **2.3 The Banking Approach and its Role in the Depoliticisation of Education**

So what kinds of pedagogies contribute to the perpetuation of a static vision of reality? Imposing knowledge on students is one of the primary ways this limiting vision is preserved. Teachers 'looking for their own reflection', or only listening for what they have already decided to be true (Kozol, 1968, p. 149), are examples of practices that stultify the educational experience for students. This imposition communicates a restricted vision of education where the teacher's didactic methods stymie their students' ambitions and motivation. This is primarily achieved by presenting knowledge as a static, intangible concept created by an intelligentsia, far removed from the classroom context (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 146). Freire (1996) coined the term 'banking' to describe a method of teaching that is didactic and propagates a vision of reality that is "motionless, static, compartmentalised, and predictable" (p.52). An educator employing a 'banking' approach to teaching views her/his role as regulating

the way the world 'enters into' the students. The teacher's task is to organise a process which already occurs spontaneously, to 'fill' the students by making

deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge  
(Freire, 1996, p 57)

This linear transfer of knowledge from teacher to passive student imposes the teacher's own experience on the student (Shor & Freire, 1987). This failure to perceive education as an opportunity for teachers and students to critically reinvent knowledge only succeeds in ostracising countless students, be they from advantaged or marginalised backgrounds. Teachers teaching by imitation prevents innovation and transformation (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), and serves to solidify the power differentials between teacher and students that traditionally have been taken as a given in Irish education (Baker et al, 2004).

### ***2.3.1 Early Career Teachers – Susceptible to Employment of Didactic Teaching Methods***

While the teaching practices of Irish early career teachers has received little attention in Irish research, NQTs' experiences of their first year teaching in primary schools has received greater scrutiny. *Beginning to Teach*, a study of NQTs' experiences of their first year in primary teaching conducted by the Inspectorate of the DES (2005a), found that some NQTs are particularly susceptible to the employment of didactic teaching methods. This tendency of NQTs to over rely on traditional teaching methods created difficulties for them in terms of implementing a differentiated approach to cater for the variety of abilities and learning styles of children. Research into the practices of teachers working in designated disadvantaged schools also points to the difficulties NQTs

experience in terms of maintaining the interest and involvement of pupils in lessons (Inspectorate of DES, 2005b)

There is also strong evidence to suggest that classroom discipline remains one of the greatest challenges for NQTs, which inhibits them in adopting and implementing a more progressive teaching programme (Inspectorate of DES, 2005a, Kagan 1992, Killeavy & Murphy, 2006, Veenman, 1984) Faced with this difficulty, and feeling they possess inadequate procedural knowledge, novice teachers can turn to a more authoritarian and custodial approach (Kagan 1992, Veenman, 1984) The prevalence of these problematic practices at the beginning of Irish primary teachers' careers highlights the need to explore the pedagogies and practices of teachers further into the early stages of their careers A number of international based studies into the professional life cycle of teachers (Day et al , 2006, Huberman, 1989) indicate that increased professional experience leads to increased experimentation and the use of more progressive teaching methods amongst early career teachers However, in the absence of experimentation, it is a career phase that can be marked by increased self doubt (Huberman, 1989)

### ***2.3.2 The Depoliticisation of Education***

The uncontested nature of consensualism is reinforced through the use of repressive teaching methodologies Rather than reminding people that history is of their own making, such an anti-intellectual approach serves to 'depoliticise' people by making them submissive to the laws of history (Gramsci, 1971) Freire (1992) argues vehemently that any society that portrays educational practice as neutral is a stagnant,

lifeless one. He states that “to try to get people to believe that there is such a thing as this [neutral education], and to convince or try to convince the incautious that this is the truth, is indisputably a political practice” (p. 77). Freire (1992) claims that the inability of the silent majority to dream a better future for themselves results in an apolitical outlook, “and the less they practice the political apprenticeship of committing themselves to a utopia, the more open they will become to ‘pragmatic’ discourses” (p. 92). Pragmatism creates a climate of subordination to the meritocratic ideals dominant in education. The reliance on traditional teaching methods has also helped to create a culture of individualism and passivity among the student body (Edwards, 1979). A vision of society that is free of conflict and argument has propagated a suspicion and fear of conflict and resistance. Passivity, which is one of the hallmarks of the influence of a banking approach to education, is not a natural condition of childhood or adulthood (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 123).

## **2.4 Teachers’ Role in the Repoliticisation of Education**

A Neo-Marxist perspective espoused by Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire can actively challenge the uncontested nature of consensualism that thrives on student passivity. The ‘repoliticisation’ of education is a step towards breaking this culture of silence and developing an environment in which teacher and student engage in meaningful dialogue as equal partners. In order to stimulate this repoliticisation process, Freire’s concept of ‘conscientisation’ needs to be employed. ‘Conscientisation’, the word most associated with Freire, describes the awakening or increase in consciousness

(Freire, 1996) The process of conscientisation aims to initiate debate on popular beliefs and assumptions which are in the dominant classes' interests (Gramsci, 1971, p 165) These beliefs and assumptions can only be tackled if the ensuing debate is focused on a 'problematization' process that presents the concrete, existential situation of all dialogical participants as a set of problems (Freire, 1976) It must also be a joint initiative taking place in human beings among human beings (Freire, 1996)

This appreciation of the dialectical relationship between human beings and their concrete historical and cultural reality means that people can believe in their capacity to change their own situation We must learn from the past and not leave our past beliefs entirely behind us (Gramsci, 1971) This dialogue can be made more productive if people's life histories and cultural heritage are used as starting points for discussion. This viewpoint ties in with the constructivist viewpoints of Vygotsky (1997) that have underpinned the Revised Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999b) Peoples' previous experiences must be that starting point for new learning This means that consciousness is never a mere reflection of material reality, but is a reflection *upon* reality (Freire, 1972, p 53) This perspective sees subjectivity and objectivity in unison Not only can critical reflection foster action but it is also an active intervention into reality (Freire, 1972) The combination of both action and reflection achieves a more powerful and liberating force – 'praxis' (Freire, 1996), which has the ability to "prize the historical dialectic free from mechanistic models of interpretation" (Kearney, 1994, p 169) Action and reflection must go together in a temporal sense and cannot be compartmentalised into a prior stage of reflection and a subsequent stage of action

(Freire, 1996) This indivisible solidarity between the two is mirrored in Freire's belief that there can be no dichotomy made between humans and their world (Crotty, 2003) Praxis is also fundamental to the process of theory and practice becoming one

This praxis strengthens, and is strengthened by, teachers taking up critical pedagogy in daily teaching As Freire (in Shor & Freire, 1987) states

education is politics! After that, when a teacher discovers that he or she is a politician, too, the teacher has to ask, what kind of politics am I doing in the classroom? That is, in favour of whom am I being a teacher? (p 46)

A teacher embarking on a project to make the classroom a place where political debate can flourish must have already formed her/his own views on the topic in question This practice mirrors Freire's belief that "reading the world" must come before "reading the words" (Freire, 1992, p. 78) The defence of a position is an appropriate methodology to provoke debate and spark students' thinking It also scaffolds appropriate participation in dialogue for students and from true dialogue comes true learning Critical reflection on behalf of the teacher also prevents classroom debate falling into "pure spontaneity" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p 156), which results in rudderless debate and leads to an ad hoc approach to the general organisation of learning It is the antithesis to effective political advocacy whose defining feature is its clarity of aims

This critical and reflective attitude also encourages and calls upon the 'politicised' teacher to speak out in various ways, demonstrating a willingness to be a public intellectual (Freire, 1998) While this role places exacting demands on teachers, it does



offer exciting possibilities in terms of strengthening the links between the personal and the professional in the lives and practices of teachers, and the more liberating forms of praxis this can generate Irwin (2012) in his discussion on the theme of the public role of intellectuals in Freire's work, outlines the importance Freire (2005) places on educators "become[ing] active problem-positors, who see their professional and personal destinies as intertwined" (Irwin, 2012, p. 93)

Building awareness amongst teachers of their positionality within the social context and the central role it plays in shaping what one sees and understands about the world (Sensory & Di Angelo, 2012, p. 8), appears an appropriate way of developing social and political teacher criticality. We are all shaped by our social, cultural and historical circumstances (Roberts, 2003). Consequently, teachers must be aware of the influence of their social positioning in the dominant culture and how it may affect their judgement and consequently practice (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). This belief in challenging our assumptions ties in with Freire's concept of themes that emerges from the life histories of people and act as a starting point for a journey of self discovery (Freire, 1996). These themes are considered 'generative' in nature. The term 'generative' is used by Freire to highlight the potential of these themes to unfold into as many themes again, which in turn call for new tasks to be fulfilled. It is the task of the educator to help the oppressed uncover the 'limit situations' that combine to act as an inhibiting force, a force that blocks a clear view of a living, holistic reality (Freire, 1996). Rather than 'disown' our prejudices and completely shed the cloak of past experiences, we must reflect upon and address our "learned and internalised oppressions" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 308) in a process

of 'owning up' to and ultimately going beyond them. We must acknowledge, as Freire repeatedly did, that our actions as teachers have consequences for the lives of others (Roberts, 2003, p. 171)

## **2.5 Ethic of Care Central to a Liberating Praxis**

If a liberating praxis is to be realised by teachers then an ethic of care will be central to this process. Not only can many of society's ills be traced back to the vacuum of emotional intelligence that has formed in contemporary society (Goleman, 1995), it also has significant repercussions for teachers seeking to espouse a transformative agenda. An ethic of care promotes the development of broad ranging relational skills and emotional capacities allowing students to empathise and understand each other's viewpoints, a central component of the dialogical classroom. It also engrains a sense of responsibility and care among students that encourages them to be proactive in the pursuit of equality. Baker et al. (2004) suggest that the failure of education to recognise and consequently assert the importance of emotions in learning is "a denial of the educational needs of both teachers and students as emotional beings" (p. 164). This lack of recognition of the importance of care practices and the associated emotional intelligence required, also serves to suppress children's development of political consciousness. Held (2006) and Tronto (1993) argue that the practice of care is an excellent foundation for the development of all citizens in a pluralistic society in which the qualities of attentiveness and responsiveness are not just confined to particular incidences of care, but inform our outlook as citizens.

Care practices, and the emotional intelligence they foster, can gain increased recognition through teachers' engagement with a process of conscientisation. It is important at this juncture to point out that conscientisation is not just a cognitive activity, it also an emotional experience (Freire, 1996). Such an acknowledgement prevents one from over emphasising the rational dimension of the process and undermining the significance of the emotional engagement required. The dominance of rational thinking is reflected not only in the previously documented esteem in which the academic subjects are held in Irish education, but also in its influence in defining society's moral norms (Farrelly, 2009). The framing of care within the limiting parameters of a rationalist paradigm has facilitated the continued primacy given to the technical aspects of teaching and "has created a legacy in academic thought and in education that is deeply antithetical to the emotional, and by implication to the emotional work involved in caring and loving" (Baker et al 2004, p 166). An ethic of justice based on Kantian philosophy contends that all moral decisions are based on reason by disinterested, independent, autonomous actors (Rawls, 1971). The dominance of this rational approach to morality is in line with the presentation of education as a neutral activity embedded in a culture of liberal individualism. If both teacher and student are to be authentically present in a dialogical process as 'co-investigators' (Freire, 1996), then a distinction cannot be made between learning for the "head, heart or mind", and there must be an acceptance that "emotions are unintelligible without reference to cognition and irreducible without intellectual work" (Golby, 1996, p 424). The serious neglect of education about the emotions in general, and in relation to care and love in particular (Baker et al, 2004), needs to be challenged by educators if a

project of transformation is to be realised. The presentation of the concrete, existential situation of children as a set of problems is central to this project. Such a conscience raising process can be made more impassioned if both teacher and student embrace it as an all encompassing cognitive and emotional experience.

Integral to the development of a culture of care is teacher empathy (Baker et al, 2004). Children from lower socio-economic groupings require teachers that are respectful of their cultural backgrounds and recognise the importance of their own communities to them. Teachers need to escape the insularity of the profession and the effect increased litigation has had on teacher-student relationships. A language of fear has grown up around sexual abuse and has resulted in the increased emotional detachment of the teacher from her/his students (Gilligan, 2003). Freire (1992) warned all educators of the danger of being subsumed by a culture of repression and fear. He calls for all educationalists to “discover and sense the joy that steeps it, that is part of it, and that is ever ready to fill the hearts of all who surrender to it” (p. 82). If the profession becomes overly concerned with accountability, standardisation, and fear of litigation then the joy that Freire exalts will be lost. Cullen (2000) makes the point that young people greatly value the knowledge that parents, teachers and other adults in the community are making their welfare paramount. Fagan’s (1995) research into the factors that cause early school leaving in Ireland, identified the lack of empathy between teachers and young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds as one of the main reasons why the education system worked to eliminate these young people from the system. Teachers who are from a working class background are likely to empathise with

students from similar backgrounds (Fagan, 1995) In recent times, and echoing earlier calls made by the EDC (2004), the Teaching Council of Ireland (2011) has called for a review of the entry procedures for teacher education courses in order to “explore ways of facilitating entry to the profession by under-represented groups” (p 12) Considerable attention has also been given to the desirability of a more diverse and representative teaching force in the literature (Dee 2001, Devine, 2011, King, 1993, Ladson-Billings, 1992), framed largely around the importance of children having role models from similar backgrounds to themselves

## **2.6 School Level Supports for Early Career Teachers**

The previous section’s analysis of the role teachers can play in the repoliticisation of education is incomplete without cognisance been taken of the situated school factors that are so influential on their capacity to act as agents of change A particular emphasis will be placed on the level of support early career teachers receive, and the potential for this support to foster a culture that has inclusivity and equality at its core

The level of support NQTs and early career teachers receive from the teaching community nourishes the expectation that their teaching will result in the holistic development of children A number of recent Irish studies into the factors associated with beginning and early career teachers’ job satisfaction highlight the importance of having support structures in place for NQTs on the first day they start teaching (Morgan & Kitching, 2007, Morgan & O’Leary, 2004) Although these supports should include

appropriate induction that familiarises NQTs with their new surroundings and the children under their care, it should also move beyond this practical help to developing supports that stimulate professional development. This point is particularly relevant to those teachers that commence their careers in designated disadvantaged schools due to the extra demands made on their ability to cope. The NIPT and the mentoring programme that forms an integral part of the initiative, has the potential to play a key role in the implementation of appropriate support structures for NQTs. However, recent cuts to funding have resulted in the abolition of release time available for NQTs to engage in school based induction activities, thus limiting this capability.

#### ***2.6.1 The Role of the Mentor in Promoting Transformative Practice***

The role of the mentor is central to the success of the NIPT (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006). So what role can mentors play in the development of transformative practice among NQTs? Tomlinson (1995) points to the importance of mentors promoting a culture of reflection and a spirit of openness that is defined as a key characteristic of an effective induction programme (Earley & Kinder, 1994, Villani, 2002). Mentoring in designated disadvantaged schools provides its own unique set of requirements (Guyton & Hidalgo, 1995). Wang and Odell's (2007) argue that this role is a demanding one, requiring the mentor to serve as a change agent, while also being an efficacious teacher, a collaborator, and a pedagogue with diverse cultural perspectives. It is therefore crucial that those that are entrusted with the responsibility of guiding NQTs through the travails of the early stages of their careers are provided with the necessary support to carry out such important duties. It is also important that they have a genuine interest in making

educational equality a priority issue, and encourage NQTs to critically reflect on their capacity to challenge inequality

### ***2.6.2 Authentic Leadership Building a Culture of Collaboration***

These support structures need to be underpinned by a strong commitment by school principals and senior management to a democratic style of leadership that encourages staff collaboration. A style of leadership that encapsulates Freire's and Gramsci's vision of hope that schools can be agents of societal transformation is 'authentic leadership' (Bhindi & Duignan, 1997). A consideration of this style of leadership provides an insight into the capacity of school leaders to impact not only on the school's community, but the community at large. This style is merely representative of a wide array of styles that advocate a sense of collegiality and co-operation among the school staff and students. Bhindi and Duignan (1997) argue that 'authentic leadership' "rejects the ingrained culture of dominance and compliance, artifice and deception, which is too frequently a part of contemporary life in organisations" (p. 119). It is a move away from the hierarchical, dependency culture in which the principal is perceived as the sole arbiter (Coleman, 1997). The style of leadership that propagates this cultural inclusivity is based on the recognition of the importance of dialogue and interdependency in relationships.

The amount of communication that teachers have with one another, and with principals, has been shown to contribute positively to several teacher outcomes including the overall level of teacher satisfaction, teacher performance and

organisational efficacy (Bridges & Hallinan 1978) It is important for principals and mentors to note that this communication must be balanced, and not focus exclusively on providing extrinsic information to NQTs in the form of performance evaluations (Lee, Dedrick, & Smith, 1991) Communication and feedback must also inform early career teachers' intrinsic sources of information which predominantly focus on their interaction with students A school leader that is comfortable to loosen the reins and allow other teachers to assume key leadership positions, is a leader that emphasises partnership, empowerment and an end to paternalism (Block, 1993)

Authentic leaders are also critically conscious, recognising the socially constructed and stratified nature of society and the oppressive structures and practices which result in differentiated outcomes for social groups depending on the social positioning (Brown, 2004a, 2004b, Shields, 2010) Crucially, it is the way in which they use this consciousness to motivate, encourage, and support teachers in their engagement with a justice praxis that marks them out as leaders of transformative change

### ***2.6.3 Collaborative School Cultures***

The sense of togetherness espoused by authentic leadership has a significant effect on early career teachers, with findings indicating that beginning teachers who work in collegial professional cultures experience greater levels of professional satisfaction, (Moore Johnson & Birkeland, 2003, Morgan & Kitching, 2007, Morgan & O'Leary, 2004) In particular, the socio-personal dimension is rated very highly by Irish beginning and early career teachers, as is a professional culture in which teachers of all levels of



experience shared in collegial and collaborative efforts (Morgan & Kitching, 2007, Morgan & O'Leary, 2004) Significantly, Morgan and Kitching's (2007) study focuses exclusively on Irish early career teachers (1-5 years teaching experience) working in designated disadvantaged schools, and found that a collegial and social atmosphere was central to their job satisfaction, sense of self-efficacy and commitment to teaching Smith and Ingersoll (2004) describe schools as organisations "where the production process requires extensive interaction among participants and, hence, is highly dependent on continuity, cohesiveness, and coherence" (p 686) This sense of collegiality acts as a buffer against the sense of isolation that the cellular organisation of schools can exacerbate in beginning teachers (Veenman, 1984) The most receptive culture to innovation and change is one "where the culture is characterised by the relentless pursuit, fascination and excitement of exploring learning and teaching issues" (Carroll & Simco, 2001, p 17)

Although staff collaboration is an important characteristic of 'moving' schools (Fullan, 2001) that are recognised for their ability to be innovative and responsive to change, the development of this culture should not impinge on teachers' autonomy Teachers who are given the freedom to change the conditions of the learning environment are likely to feel more effective in teaching inclusive methodologies than those who do not have such levels of freedom (Holdaway, 1978) A significant contextual factor that impinges on the creation of a reflective educational environment is the degree of autonomy afforded to teachers in schools Kilgore, Ross, and Zbikowski (1990) discovered a negative relationship between teachers' frequency of reflectivity

and the degree of control school leadership exercised over teachers. The area of control over one's professional environment is considered crucial to positive self-efficacy (Lee et al., 1991). As previously discussed, teacher efficacy plays a significant role in the willingness of beginning teachers to find better ways of teaching (Bandura, 1997, Morgan & O'Leary, 2004), an essential quality of a teacher who desires to 'make a difference'.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

It would be misleading to represent a liberating praxis articulated in this chapter as a panacea for all the ills of society. As Irwin (2012) illuminates, Freire is particularly conscious of the limited role education can play on its own in a project of social transformation and asserts that "education is not a miraculous process capable by itself of effecting the changes necessary to move a nation from one epoch to another" (Freire, 2005, p. 36 cited in Irwin, 2012, p. 94). What the dialogical approach espoused by Gramsci and Freire can succeed in doing however, is contradict the logic of domination, contradict the dichotomised curriculum, and challenges the static vision of reality which only serves to inhibit democracy and critical thought (Shor & Freire, 1987). The quest for critical consciousness cannot remain within the exclusive domain of a rarefied privileged few (Gramsci, 1971), as to do so would run the risk of imposing an external solution (O'Brien, 2008). For a lasting and truly transformation to be enacted, it must be by students, with students but not for students (Freire, 1972).

## **Chapter Three**

### **Teacher Identity and Early Career Teachers**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

It is important to explore teacher identity, particularly in the early stages of a teacher's career, as it is highly influential on a teacher's belief system and practice. Teacher identity reflects the deep belief structures that ultimately drive teaching practice (Pajares, 1992), reflecting fundamental beliefs and an unconscious sense of normalcy (Nelson, 2008). The process of becoming a competent professional is fundamentally about a process of identity development (Galman, 2009). This developmental process requires an engagement with identity so that teaching becomes "a state of being, not merely a way of acting or behaving" (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 3). In order for teachers to embrace a social justice agenda, then an embodiment of the aforementioned 'state of being' is required to mobilise this objective. Identity provides a roadmap for teachers as they traverse the difficult first years in the profession. It is a story to live by, it is how an individual might explain both self and motivation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996).

The chapter is in four parts. Part one examines the influence of liberal individualism on teacher identity formation. The influence social class and gender have on teacher identity formation is the topic of focus in part two. Part three explores the various ways in which teacher identity influences teachers' understandings of 'making a difference'. In the process, a rationale is provided for this study's focus on early career teachers' life.

histories and identity formation. Finally, in part four, Bourdieu's (1972) concept of 'habitus' is discussed in terms of its ability to illuminate the personal, situated, and professional dimensions to teacher identity formation and articulation.

### **3.2 The Pervasive Influence of Liberal Theory on Teacher Identity**

This section identifies the factors that frequently combine to limit the capacity of early career teachers to develop a teaching identity that is socially agentic. It concentrates on the guiding ideologies at work in our education system, ideologies that have the ability to limit the development of a teacher identity that has social justice, equality and inclusion at its heart. In particular, the ability of liberal theory to conceal its central role in legitimising the influence of the 'market' on our educational system is highlighted. The need for pre-service and early career teachers to critically reflect on the pervasive influence of liberal individualism on the formation of their guiding assumptions is outlined.

Liberal theory's simplistic assumption that educators can treat everyone equally needs to be challenged if a vision of equality of condition (Baker et al, 2004) is to be realised.<sup>9</sup> One of the primary assumptions made by liberal theory is that education is capable of creating and sustaining social change by redressing social inequalities through the equalisation of educational opportunities (Baker et al, 2004, Drudy & Lynch, 1993). Within education, liberal theory acts as a legitimising force in education.

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<sup>9</sup> 'Equality of condition' sets out a much more ambitious aim than liberal egalitarianism. Rather than accepting that many major inequalities are inevitable as liberal egalitarianism does, equality of condition seeks to eliminate major inequalities altogether (Baker et al, 2004).

for the rampant economic reductionism that has so heavily influenced the Irish educational system, particularly during the 'Celtic Tiger' years. It achieves this by portraying schooling as critically affecting the level of economic growth and progress through its links to technology and industry (Apple, 1982b, 1982c). This underlying assumption remains unchallenged by human capital and allocation theorists who continue to miss an important function of schooling, namely the school's place as an agent of production of cultural capital (Apple, 1982c, Baker et al., 2004, Bourdieu, 1997). The possibility of maximising teacher agency and generating collective action that challenges inequality is significantly reduced if teachers fail to recognise the role the school plays in cultural and economic reproduction (Apple, 1979).

A further challenge to liberal theory's claim that treating everyone equally will be transformative is provided by Bourdieu's (1997) conversion theory. Bourdieu (1997) argues that economic capital is fundamental to all other capitals (Mills, 2008), and his theory illustrates how other capitals such as social and cultural capital are transformed, disguised forms of economic capital that "produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal" (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 54). Possession of cultural capital, proven to be central to the pursuit of the dominant classes' narrow definition of 'educational success', is reliant on investment of time. The transformation of economic capital into cultural capital presupposes an expenditure of time that is made possible by possession of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1997). Possession of economic capital is central to the continued dominance of the meritocratic educational system that acts as a cover for inequality (Baker et al., 2004, Drudy & Lynch, 1993).

Bourdieu's conversion theory is often perceived as something of an allocation theory (cultural capital being used as a sorting device to assign students, by class, to their 'proper position' in society, see Apple, 1982c) and therefore lacking dynamism and possibilities for social transformation (see Giroux, 1983). However, his belief that the system of teaching and the language used in schools are the principle means of achieving this reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) provides a vehicle for initiating change. Engagement in critical reflection on their role in the continued influence of the dominant group's 'cultural arbitraries'<sup>10</sup> presents teachers with an opportunity to initiate a process of real change through their practice.

### *3.2.1 Lack of Awareness of Hegemony*

The need for such reflection is evident in light of Irish based research that points to pre-service teachers' absence of recognition that education systems are based primarily on the beliefs and values of the dominant middle class (Leavy, 2005). Indicative of the pervasive influence of consensualism that has enveloped the policy context, this lack of awareness of the hegemonic influence on education reflects the absence of critical reflection and engagement with the political forces that shape our education system. The perception that schools were inherently fair institutions was a recurring theme in Leavy's (2005) findings and is confirmed by other international researchers (Cruz, 1997, Sleeter, 1995, 2001). In order to further our understanding of the role the teacher education continuum can play in initiating and sustaining a process of political and

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<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) refer to the cultural products offered in school as cultural arbitraries to indicate the highly arbitrary way in which they are selected and assessed. In particular, they highlight the social class biases in what is taught, to whom, when and how.

social teacher criticality, there is a need to first assess practicing teachers' awareness of hegemony. This study has the capacity to begin the process by exploring early career teachers' ideas about fairness, as expressed through their understandings of 'making a difference' and the shape it takes in their day-to-day practice.

### ***3.2.2 Difficulties in 'Decoupling Attachments to Liberal Individualism'***

Liberal individualism's dual emphasis on agency and autonomy acts as a shield against the interrogation of one's own capitulation and submission to its dominant discursive practices. The notion of the abstract individual needs to be challenged as it "can act as an ideological presupposition that keeps us from establishing any genuine sense of affiliation with those who produce our comforts, thus making it even more difficult to overcome the atrophication of collective commitment" (Apple, 1979, p. 10). The unjust inequalities that persist in Irish society are hidden to some extent by the failure of liberalism to situate the life of the individual as an economic *and* social being (Apple, 1979). In relation to teachers and how they professionally engage with one another, the emphasis liberal individualism places on autonomy has the effect of making collaborative action among teachers problematic in schools. The claim by Edwards (1979) that most resistances in schools will occur, by necessity, on an individual rather than a collective level, points to the great difficulty teachers have in breaking away from the hegemonic influences of liberal individualism that mould a spirit of possessive individualism.

The process of attempting to enhance teacher awareness and commitment to social action is demanding and potentially painful for teachers (De Freitas & McAuley, 2008). There is a distinct need to initiate a frank and open conversation about privilege and oppression among student and beginning teachers and interrogate their possible emotional investment in ‘inscribed habits of inattention’ (Boler, 1997). De Freitas and McAuley (2008) speak about the difficult emotional labour involved in “decoupling attachments to liberal individualism” (p. 430), and consequently (student) teachers may react with openness as well as resistance to the process. Rather than perceive this discomfort as a negative it can be interpreted as a sign that a programme is having a positive effect on pre-service teacher professional identity (Galman, 2009). While student resistance to social and racial justice content in particular should not be dismissed or ignored, if properly mediated it can become part of developing an identity as an agent for change (Allard & Santoro, 2006, Chubbuck, 2004, Tatum, 1997).

### ***3.2.3 Managerial Concerns Surrounding Technical Control and Efficiency***

The influence of liberal theory is witnessed in the growth of a performativity and accountability culture that has gained an ever increasing influence in the Irish primary education system (Conway & Murphy, 2013). An increased focus on managerial concerns surrounding technical control and efficiency is indicative of the growth of this new phenomenon (Troman, 2008). These new accountabilities and their focus on measurable outcomes constrain transformative praxis by orienting teachers towards more technical forms of practice. Teachers working in designated disadvantaged schools, and especially those at the early stages of their careers, are particularly affected



by pressures emanating from the rigorous testing regime that operates in these schools (Kitching, 2010a) This commitment to raising achievement may not have been envisaged by teachers in past generations due to the prominence of beliefs in static abilities (Troman, 2008)

Another development that may not have been anticipated by past generations of teachers is the increasing pressure on teachers to justify their judgments and actions (Troman, 2008) The expectation that every teacher assumes shared responsibility for schools' implementation of the aforementioned literacy and numeracy programmes makes them more accountable to parents and the community at large It is inevitable that managerialism in education shifts teachers' professional identities in order to make them more responsive to client demand and external judgment (Apple, 2004) Singh et al (2005) point to the dismissal of any claims to 'truth' based on the expertise of educators and believes that there is an over reliance on "speculative marketing data, heavily massaged financial reports, and corporate managerial techniques of image management" (p 15) This shift appears to bring with it reduced professional power and status, as performance management strategies serve to limit teacher agency

The increasing concern that new entrants to the primary profession express in relation to discipline and maintenance of control (Inspectorate of DES, 2005a, Killeavy & Murphy, 2006) is symptomatic of this repressive managerial culture Inexperienced teachers often consider it a personal failure if they perceive that their students cannot be properly controlled (Sugrue, 1996, p 165) These concerns are reflected in Irish

beginning teachers' calls for more emphasis to be placed on the practicalities of teaching (Inspectorate of DES, 2005a, Killeavy & Murphy, 2006), a finding that is confirmed in US-based literature (Garrahy, Cothran, & Kulinna, 2005, Schempp, Sparkes, & Templin, 1993) In light of the increasing concerns about school discipline, particularly in schools serving marginalised communities (EDC, 2004), there is a danger of concepts such as 'control' becoming part of the package of being a 'good' teacher and the inevitable sense of guilt and burnout that results when students cease to be as compliant as previous generations (Hargreaves, 1994 cited in Sugrue, 1996) If the dominant aspects of school culture such as 'control' and the 'transmission of knowledge' are not reflected upon and critiqued by student teachers and beginning teachers, there is a danger that they leave themselves open to being consumed by them

### **3.3 Constraining Structural Factors and the Situated Context**

'Structural factors' refer to the patterned social arrangements which form the society as a whole, and which determine, to varying degrees, the actions of individuals socialised into that structure (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 2000) This section explores the influence structural factors such as social class and gender have on teacher identity formation

### ***3.3.1 The Influence of Teachers' Social Class on Professional Identity Formation and Practice***

The influence of teachers' class identity and position can inhibit their ability to occupy an agentive space in their profession. The influence of teachers' social class is explored in Galman's (2009) study into pre-service teachers' experience of social dissonance as a catalyst for development. As part of their middle class 'habitus',<sup>11</sup> the participants in Galman's (2009) study were less willing to put up with feelings of discomfort and dissonance around issues of social justice. This is attributed to the way in which their socio-economic position afforded them more opportunities to consider options outside of teaching and act out these 'side bets' (Dworkin, 1987). This dismissal of cultural dissonance is significant as dissonance is something that is widely acknowledged as a prerequisite for engagement with issues of social justice (Boler & Zembylas, 2003). This failure to use dissonance as a catalyst for development affords such individuals an opportunity to create an identity as a person who was failed by teacher preparation and teaching in general (Galman, 2009). Consequently, it can be assumed that such an unwillingness to confront feelings of discomfort around issues of social justice suppresses teachers' ability to act as agents for social transformation. The need to explore the possible effects of such dissonance on Irish primary teachers working in urban, working class communities is intensified considering the tendency of teachers to have lower expectations and deficit perspectives of students from working

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<sup>11</sup> 'Habitus' refers to the structurally patterned matrix of preferences and dispositions that are developed across social classes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). It is a term that encapsulates the beliefs, values, conduct, speech, dress, manners that characterises the recurring patterns of social class outlook (Mills, 2008). See Section 3.5.1 for a detailed treatment of the concept.

class and minority ethnic backgrounds<sup>12</sup> (Boaler, 2000, Hoadley & Ensor, 2009, Lynch & Lodge, 2002, Lyons, Lynch, Close, Sheerin, & Boland, 2003) While the middle class origins of the majority of the teaching population may have implications for the way in which teachers engage with working class students (Drudy & Lynch, 1993), it is significant that Kennedy (1995 cited in Travers et al , 2010) found that teachers had low expectations for pupils despite the fact that they themselves came from a similar working class background

Discourses of cultural deficit are also found to negatively influence the way both early career and veteran teachers perceive working class parents (Bakker, Denessen, & Brus-Laeven, 2007) These negative cultural assumptions are invariably fuelled by teachers' criticism of some parents for their lack of involvement in their children's education (Travers et al , 2010) According to Drudy and Lynch (1993), teachers often point to parents' lack of attendance at parent teacher meetings as evidence of their lack of commitment Research by O'Brien (2007, 2009) into the lives of Irish working class mothers found that working class parents care deeply about their children's education However, in the face of persistent and economic insecurity and cultural exclusion because of their social class or ethnicity, and despite expending enormous amounts of emotional labour, O'Brien reports that some working class mothers are often not in a position to participate more actively in their children's education due to a depletion in their emotional resources which would otherwise allow them to act on that care

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<sup>12</sup> The term 'minority ethnic' is defined in Section 3 3 2

Owing to their inexperience, and their cultural background, early career teachers have little experience with, or knowledge of, the challenges working class and/or minority parents face when attempting to participate in their children's education (Ratchffe & Hunt, 2009). This deficit of experience, allied with concerns about being ill-prepared to engage with parents (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006), can lead to early career teachers constructing bounded and guarded relationships with parents. This development can have serious consequences for working class students' experiences of education, as much is written about the significant educational, social and behavioural benefits that accrue to children as a result of an open and effective partnership between teachers and parents (Henderson & Berla, 1994, Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2005, OECD, 1997). These culturally conceived views about working class students and parents held by some teachers, and the limiting practices they can engender, highlight the need to further our understandings of the genesis of these problematic assumptions by exploring teachers' life histories.

### ***3.3.2 Problematic Teacher Identity Positioning in Relation to Diversity***

Ireland has become home to a significantly large number of very diverse populations of immigrants since the 1990s (Central Statistics Office, 2008). Schools, particularly those located in marginalised communities, have witnessed an unprecedented increase in ethnic diversity amongst their student numbers (Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity, & Byrne, 2009). These changes present teachers with significant opportunities and challenges. Within this context, the attitudes and actions of teachers towards students from diverse backgrounds assume critical importance. Prior to an examination of the policies and

practices of interculturalism in Irish schools and their influence on students' experiences of schooling, it is first necessary to define some of the terms that will be used in this discussion and throughout the thesis as a whole

This study uses the terms 'minority ethnic' and 'minority language' student<sup>13</sup> As outlined by Travers et al , (2010), the term 'minority ethnic' refers to a student from an ethnic background other than the dominant white ethnic group in Irish schools. The term 'minority language' is used in reference to a student who does not speak either English or Irish as a first language in the Irish education system. As Travers et al , (2010) state, "the term 'minority' is used in advance of 'language' or 'ethnicity' to denote the status position of the language or ethnicity within Irish society, as opposed to the dominant position of the 'majority language', English or the majority ethnicity" (p. 5). While acknowledging that the term 'diversity' can carry broader meanings (e.g. see Government of Ireland, 2006)<sup>14</sup>, for the purposes of this study the term 'diversity' is used in reference to students' ethnicity, unless otherwise stated.

Prior to a discussion on early career teachers and their engagement with the theme of interculturalism, there is first a need to locate this discussion within the national policy context. At the local level of the school, interculturalism is predominantly informed by

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<sup>13</sup> Travers et al , (2010) use the terms "minority ethnic" and "minority language" student following problems identified by the English Language Support Teachers' Association with words previously used, including non-nationals, foreign nationals, new Irish and non-Irish nationals (McDaid, 2009 cited in Travers et al , 2010, p. 5).

<sup>14</sup> The *National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010* (Government of Ireland, 2006) defines diversity in its broadest sense in terms of social class, gender, family status, returned Irish emigrants, people with a disability, the Traveller community, refugees, asylum seekers, black Irish, children with gay or lesbian parents. The list is not exhaustive.

broader state discourses and policies which privilege national economic interests over social justice concerns (Bryan 2010, Kitching, 2010a) Mirroring the educational inequality policy discourse, a liberal model of interculturalism is promulgated by the Irish state (Kitching, 2010a) Fuelled by the Celtic Tiger and concerns about economic expansion, Bryan (2010) argues that the national social policy context has been oriented around a 'corporate-style multiculturalism' "that formulates the contribution of migrants almost exclusively in terms of their labour, and the resulting economic benefits they offer the nation" (p 254) The influence of corporate multiculturalism and eco-individualism is evident in the state's approach to language support for minority language students Nowlan (2008) argues that the focus of this approach is focused on 'fixing' minority populations, and as a consequence any future achievement issues can only emerge in deficit, meritocratic terms By solely offering language support as the state's primary means of working towards inclusion, policy prevents discussion on the role racialisation or meritocracy plays in school achievement (Kitching, 2010a, p 221)

This market driven ideology also has a profound effect on how schools and teachers engage with the considerable task of tackling prejudice and racism The prevalence of racism in the lives of minority ethnic students is well documented in the literature (Devine, 2011, Devine & Kelly, 2006, Devine et al , 2004, Smyth et al , 2009) <sup>15</sup> Similar to the influence of consensualism on the educational inequality context, the state's approach to tackling prejudice and racism is concerned with changing individuals While the rhetoric of interculturalism gives the impression that the state is responding to

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<sup>15</sup> McGorman and Sugrue's (2007) study into intercultural education in Dublin 15 schools found only limited experience of racism in the schools surveyed

racism (Bryan, 2010), its underlying logic, as reflected in the Intercultural Guidelines for primary schools (NCCA, 2005b), is one that locates “institutional racism entirely within the walls of the school” (Kitching, 2010a, p 221) In this way, education policy fails to recognise the emergence of racism through structural racism, the conditions of the family, and other factors (Kitching & Curtin, 2012) This approach has largely relegated racism to teachers’ prejudicial attitudes and dispositions within individual schools, rather than being conceptualised as a system of power and privilege (Kitching, 2010a, Bryan, 2012 cited in Kavanagh, 2013) These policy discourses have placed significant demands on teachers, which in some cases have led to problematic practices For example, a number of studies have reported on teachers’ downplaying or denying racist incidents, or attributing them to clashes of personality or cultural misunderstandings (Devine, 2005, Smyth et al, 2009) The influence of ‘corporate multiculturalism’ is also reflected in the way “‘doing well’ has become co-opted as the tacit discourse of ‘good’ migrants” ‘Good migrants’ are thus positioned as providing an example to the ‘bad’ (indigenous) working class” (Kitching, 2010a, p 224) Teacher discourses that have developed around these understandings can serve to deny minority ethnic students’ own sense of agency and positioning, and is premised on the condition that they do not become ‘bad’ migrants (Devine, 2005, 2009, Kitching, 2010a, 2010b)

The underlying logic of the aforementioned government rhetoric around interculturalism is articulated in ideas around celebrating, embracing and respecting diversity (Bryan, 2010), and these ideas are embedded in the Intercultural Guidelines for primary schools (NCCA, 2005b) The prevalence of celebratory events and activities in



many Irish schools is well documented in the Irish research (Devine, 2011, Bryan, 2009, Bryan & Bracken, 2011) While well intentioned, and reflective of best practice (NCCA, 2005b), these activities can often be superficial and tokenistic events that have the capacity to misrepresent minority groups' cultures and cultural identities, and reinforce negative stereotypes (Bryan, 2008, 2009) By investing in a celebratory approach, teachers can unconsciously further the hierarchical position between the advantaged and culturally dominant group by drawing a distinction between those who do the celebrating and those who are celebrated or valued (Bryan, 2008, 2009)

#### ***3.3.2.1 Early Career Teachers and Diversity***

While no Irish studies have looked specifically at the experiences of Irish early career teachers in relation to teaching for diversity, Leavy (2005) reported a high level of discomfort with the topic among Irish pre-service teachers The minimal level of exposure that pre-service primary teachers have to cultural and ethnic diversity prior to the commencement of their ITE is identified as a source of this discomfort Leavy (2005) reports that 59% of pre-service teachers surveyed had practically no exposure to a member of the travelling community, 65% had limited exposure (one or less conversation) to people of different nationalities, while 65% of the sample reported an absence of contact with members of this community These findings correlate with international studies of pre-service teachers' beliefs which show that pre-service teachers have little contact with people from minority populations and cultures (Zimpher, 1989) and bring little cross-cultural knowledge, background and experience

with them on entry to college (Barry & Lechner, 1995, Larke, 1990, Law & Lane, 1987, Valli, 1995)

Limited contact with people from diverse backgrounds has the knock on effect of making early career teachers vulnerable to school cultures that may be at best ambivalent to diversity and difference (Gilligan, 2007) The adoption of such a position ultimately serves to perpetuate and further solidify existing inequalities (De Freitas & McAuley, 2008) Research on teacher identity indicates the tendency of schools to assimilate children from diverse backgrounds into the existing local culture (De Freitas & McAuley, 2008, Lingard & Keddie, 2013, McDaid, 2009) There is a need to challenge this process on two fronts The first is the failure of the school to recognise the lived experience of 'difference' (Gilligan, 2007) Secondly, assimilation could also be interpreted as a strategy for avoiding the political and historical context of schooling In light of Leavy's (2005) Irish based findings and the proliferation of international studies that conclude that pre-service teachers prefer to teach children who are from similar class backgrounds to them (Delpit, 1988, Mahan & Boyle, 1981, Zimpher, 1989), the temptation for inexperienced teachers to adopt a comforting and safe position is considerable Assimilation serves to deny local and global histories of oppression which ultimately serves to perpetuate existing inequalities (Apple, 1979, 2004)

Dilemmas have been created for teachers who feel unprepared through their ITE and in-service education to work effectively with minority ethnic and minority language students (McDaid, 2009, McGorman & Sugrue, 2007) There is a clear need to invite

teachers to “interrogate the forces, both internal and external, that shape their identity options” (Reeves, 2009, p 40) to allow them implement more transformative conceptualisations of intercultural education. This process needs to be continued into teachers’ early professional development in order to situate their new experience of encountering students from diverse backgrounds in a context of identity consciousness.

### ***3.3.3 Gender and Teacher Identity***

Teacher identity formation is also strongly influenced by societal expectations that have developed around issues of gender. An analysis of research by Drudy et al (2005) into the reasons why there is such an under representation of the male population in primary teaching in Ireland indicates a number of potential barriers that must be addressed before they can perform a transformative role in schools. The perception that primary teaching is ‘a woman’s job’ (Oyler, Jennings, & Lozada, 2001) was the most frequently offered explanation by a cohort of school leavers and student teachers for the low proportion of male entrants to primary teaching. Other reasons given include low pay, the attraction of other careers, and the perception that primary teaching was “unattractive, boring, hassle, stressful or requiring too much patience” (Drudy et al, 2005, p 107). These latter two reasons are corroborated by Dworkin’s (1987) study which indicates that males are often construed as having automatic ‘side bets’. Their habitus as men in a patriarchal society can provide them with a sense of entitlement that militates against men feeling compelled to embark on an uncomfortable or unwanted career trajectory (Galman, 2009). These findings raise questions about the capacity for

some male teachers to fully commit to teaching, particularly in the early stages of their career

The pervasiveness of the belief that women have a particular biological aptitude for the work of 'caring' for children (Galman, 2009), coupled with the continued influence of a dominant discourse that legitimises a narrow, archaic feminine ideal (Forrester, 2005, Meiners, 2002), presents a serious challenge for female teachers wishing to engage in transformative practice. As discussed in Chapter Two (see Section 2.5), the false dichotomy that has been created between the rational and emotional intelligences in education has led to the marginalisation of education about the emotions in general and in relation to care and love in particular (Baker et al., 2004). Dialogue is at the heart of a liberating praxis and an ethic of care promotes the development of emotional capacities allowing students to empathise and appreciate each other's views. The marginalisation of care practices traditionally associated with women and the subordination of emotion in favour of the development of cognitive capabilities are closely linked (Baker et al., 2004, O'Brien, 2008). In order to address this highly problematic linkage, there must be an emphasis placed on defining a caring teacher as someone who is committed to teaching and to professional relationships with pupils (Farrelly, 2009). Such an affirmation allows one to value this very important aspect of teaching without perpetuating a patriarchal discourse which links caring invariably to femininity (Vogt, 2002). A professional commitment underpinned by an ethic of care and moral responsibility is central to teachers' professional identities (Farrelly, 2009, Furlong & O'Brien, 2009). It is also imperative that care is a central component of

children's educational experience As O'Brien (2008) states "if it [an ethic of care] occupies a token or marginal position, then a rationalistic, technicist model will continue to narrow students' learning and impact on their well-being" (p 177)

### **3.4 Varied Understandings of 'Making a Difference'**

Having identified and assessed the influence of liberal ideology and structural identity factors on teachers' personal, situated, and professional identity formation, it is important at this juncture to explore how teacher identity influences teachers' understandings of 'making a difference' Particular attention will be given to the ways in which a 'new' global, ideological alliance (that is beginning to subsume liberal theory) is impacting on teachers' ideas of 'making a difference' This in turn will help to bring clarity to a debate that is ongoing in relation to the changing identity positions that are so influential on teachers' practice (Nelson, 2008) In light of gaps identified in the literature, the section concludes with a look at the role this study can play in increasing our understandings of the concept of 'making a difference'

Recent research into teacher identity has demonstrated a shift in initial teacher motivation for entering the profession Increased job opportunities, coupled with the creation of differentiated roles and opportunities to advance in the profession have changed teachers' expectations (Troman, 2008) Moore Johnson (2004) argues that the previous generation of American teachers made the decision to enter teaching in an era when career opportunities were severely curtailed In contrast, the present generation of

teachers have higher career expectations and want teaching to provide them with the chance to occupy differentiated roles and the opportunity to gain promotion (Moore Johnson, 2004)

So what effect have these increased opportunities had on early career teachers' professional identities? Troman (1996, 2008) points to the increased investment in the self among the generation of the 'new professionals' and argues that this softer, late modern and ambiguous narrative of 'making a difference' has replaced the 'grand narratives' that previous generations of new teachers alluded to. In a study into primary teacher identity in performative school cultures, Troman (2008) highlights the contrast between the younger female teachers in the study who tended to stress 'interpersonal' values and had developed teacher and mothering identities invested in love and care often involving their own children, with older teachers who tended to stress their initial vocational commitment and strong service ethic. While some of the younger female teachers expressed the 'service' theme in the form of wanting 'to make a difference', they also stressed the importance of time compatibility for family-friendly work and child care. Although any shift to a more ambiguous narrative of 'making a difference' could be interpreted as symptomatic of decreasing investment in public life, this protection of the personal need not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of the influence of possessive individualism and 'instrumentality' (Troman, 2008). Instead, it highlights the ability of teachers in the contemporary setting to construct and continually develop parallel commitments and identities, and as a result become adept at juggling their personal and professional lives (Kelchtermans, 1996). However, Hargreaves's

(2005) study into teachers' emotional responses to educational change claims that there is no sign of the emergence of what Hargreaves (2005) describes as "the more cynical, calculative identities" (p. 974) among early career teachers that Troman (1996) identified. Instead, Hargreaves points to the passion and principled commitment of the new generation of teachers.

#### ***3.4.1 'Odd' Effects of a Performativity Culture***

As discussed in Chapter One, the scope, intensity and intent of accountability and performativity in Irish education has increased exponentially in recent years (Conway & Murphy, 2013). The heightened attentiveness towards testing and measurable outcomes that these new accountabilities promote among teachers was also outlined. While the specific focus of Chapter One was on the national policy context, this section will explore the increasing influence the globalisation movement is having on teacher identity and understandings of 'making a difference'. Singh et al. (2005) claim that a 'new' alliance linking diverse agendas, namely 'conservative modernization', 'neoliberal post-modernization', and 'instrumental technocracy' with 'authoritarian populism' has emerged from the globalisation project. This odd mismatch of seemingly conflicting ideas has joined forces to integrate education policies, pedagogies, and politics into a contradictory amalgam of ideological commitments. Significantly, their educational objectives are in kilter with their economic, social, and cultural goals which are linked to the expansion of the unfettered market. Singh et al. (2005) state:

The seemingly contradictory ideas of state-sponsored competition, regulation by market forces and a life supposedly made good by consumerism, on the one

hand, and the equally tension-ridden notions of doing much, much more with much, much less, worker accountability, performance standardization, state testing, and nationalized curriculum have been used in odd ways to reinforce each other (p 14)

The influence of this odd combination of forces is seen in the contradictory and conflicting attitudes that participant teachers in Troman's (2008) English based study had towards state testing. Troman's findings highlight the boost in morale that teachers received when their students achieved good Standard Assessment Tasks results, especially in schools serving marginalised communities. Despite feeling self-affirmed by the positive results, the educational legitimacy and usefulness of the tests were universally questioned by the study's participants. The impact on teacher identity is significant as the teachers in Troman's (2008) study perceived themselves as competent implementers of instrumental policies, while at the same time feeling their professional judgment was being undermined by them (Jeffrey & Woods, 1998). This contradictory attitude to state testing is symbolic of the 'odd' effects the driving ideology of the 'new' alliance is having on teachers' beliefs, pedagogies and politics.

### ***3.4.2 Imagining a Better Future***

Despite the impact this new ideological alliance is having on teachers, the knowledge that they are making a difference in the lives of their students and are engaged in meaningful relationships is still perceived by teachers as the ultimate reward for those who make a commitment to teaching in marginalised communities (Williams, 2003). Day et al's (2006) evaluation of English teachers' initial motivation for entering



teaching points conclusively to the intrinsic nature of the factors that attracted them to the profession. When the 1143 respondents were asked to identify their initial motivation for deciding to become a teacher, 51% cited 'working with children' and a further 17% referred to 'wanting to make a difference'. Teachers who persevered in schools in marginalised communities identified the importance of occupying an agentic space, respecting the students they work with, and imagining better futures for their students as the primary factors that sustained their commitment levels (Day et al., 2006), and is a finding that is confirmed in US-based research (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Nieto, 2003).

A research philosophy that explores the factors and processes that sustain teachers' passion and commitment to 'making a difference' challenges the dominant 'teacher effectiveness' research paradigm and its focus on identifying ways of 'fixing' or 'filling' teachers up with best practices (Nieto, 2003, p. 7). In the Irish research context, there has been a proliferation of state commissioned studies into teacher performance in designated disadvantaged schools (Eivers, Shiel, & Shortt, 2005; Inspectorate of DES, 2005b, 2011; Weir & Denner, 2013). These quantitative studies have framed the difference teachers are making exclusively in terms of test scores and achievement of measurable objectives and standards. In this narrow understanding of 'making a difference', the voices of teachers and students are marginalised.

Recently, a series of Irish studies have focused on the life worlds of teachers in the early stages of their careers and have offered a counter narrative to the teacher

effectiveness discourse. These psychologically framed studies have focused on identifying the factors and processes that increase and sustain early career teachers' job satisfaction, motivation, resilience and self-efficacy (Kitching et al., 2009, Morgan, 2011, Morgan & Kitching, 2007, Morgan & O'Leary, 2004, Morgan et al., 2010). Cumulatively, these studies have called for more emphasis to be placed on the positive, daily events that sustain beginning teachers' commitment to their teaching roles, and identify student engagement and student achievement as the major factors in incidents triggering regular positive feelings. More recently, Devine et al.'s (2013) study into Irish teachers' beliefs and practices has also sought to address the gap in our understandings of 'why teachers teach the way they do' (p. 83). This mixed methods study identified the importance of passion, reflection, planning, love of children and the social and moral dimension to Irish teachers' constructs of good teaching (Devine et al., 2013). This thesis, and its focus on the question of 'making a difference' and what shape it takes in the daily practices of early career teachers working in designated disadvantaged schools, can add to our understandings of the factors and processes that sustain teacher commitment and agency. In particular, the primacy it affords to the voices and lived experiences of teachers and the critical socio-cultural focus to its analysis, offers a fresh perspective that can complement the work already completed in the Irish research context.

### **3.5 Ways of Exploring Early Career Teachers' Vision of 'Making a Difference'**

In order to effectively explore the role cultural factors and processes play in shaping early career teachers' professional identities and their understandings of 'making a difference', it is important that careful attention is paid to the possible ways that this highly complex and sensitive process may be initiated and developed. The following excavation of the relevant literature identifies models that will drive this exploration.

#### ***3.5.1 'Habitus' - Providing a Lens through which the World is Ordered***

Bourdieu's (1972) concept of 'habitus' is extremely useful when examining teacher identity formation as it provides a lens through which the world is ordered. Habitus is a term that "characterises the recurring patterns of social class outlook – the beliefs, values, conduct, speech, dress and manners – that are inculcated by everyday experiences within the family, the peer group and the school" (Mills, 2008, p. 80). In the context of this study's focus on early career teachers' practice, habitus enables an intelligible and necessary relation to be established between practices and a situation.

In order to deconstruct this key relation between teachers' practice and the contexts they work in, Bourdieu's (1984) definition of 'taste' is insightful. Bourdieu (1984) outlines how social class tends to determine a person's likes and interests, and how distinctions based on social class get reinforced in daily life. "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (p. 6). If taste functions as a story of social orientation guiding occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their

given position in social space, then it also engenders a dislike towards other behaviours that are not part of one's 'sense of one's place' (Bourdieu, 1984, p 466) These aesthetic dispositions which depict one's status, also serve to distance oneself from lower socio-economic groups It is the dominant classes that define aesthetic concepts As a consequence the subordinate classes are left with forced choices or "choices of destiny" (Bourdieu, 1984, p 178) which reaffirm the principle of conformity to the dominant classes' explicit norm of popular taste This critique of 'taste' as a classification system helps to explain why teachers from middle class backgrounds can find it difficult to empathise and understand children from lower socio-economic groups (Fagan, 1995) It also emphasises the need to challenge the climate of conformity and consensualism in our educational system that has consistently failed to recognise the legitimacy of working class culture

The capability of 'habitus' and 'taste' to account for distinctions in practice that reflect the structuring of the psyche, will inform this study's research methodology Principally, it will help to lead respondents through the continuum of identity formation from their temporal stories of early socialisation and 'becoming teacher' to their current stories of 'being teacher' Used as a lens through which the study's participants' lived experiences of 'making a difference' are explored, habitus provides an insight into the often intangible or unconscious belief structures that are encapsulated in statements such as 'this is how things are done here' and 'because that's just the way it is', belief structures that determine teachers' practice

### 3.5.2 '*Habitus*' - *Limiting or Liberating?*

In order to highlight the potential of habitus to uncover the language, beliefs, relationships, and values that interact and combine to create early career teachers' identities, the debate that surrounds the transformative potential of habitus will be provide a good contextual backdrop for such an exposé. Habitus is a concept that sets boundaries. Although commentators have often labelled Bourdieu as a structuralist, Harker and May (1993) claim that he is simply trying to account for agency in a world fettered by constraints. These boundaries allow 'free' agency to individuals to adopt strategic practices that have the potential to be transformative (Calhoun, 1993, Mills, 2008). It is the complex amalgam of the past and present (Mills, 2008) that contrives to make the habitus an arena available to be contested. The durable, transportable dispositions (capacities, tendencies, propensities or inclinations) of mind and body that constitute it are acquired through a gradual process of inculcation. Bourdieu (1996) argues that a class habitus tends to reproduce the conditions of its own reproduction 'unconsciously' through the creation and consolidation of forms of cultural capital that can be employed to consolidate one's status in the relevant fields of power (Apple, 2004).

Although Bourdieu's (1996) exposition does provide a navigational path through the comfortable journey that the middle classes make with market ideology (Ball, 2003), it does appear to be lacking a transformative dynamic (Apple, 1979). The socio-cultural homogeneity of entrants to primary teaching (predominantly white, female and middle class) (Drudy et al, 2005) could be viewed as a product of middle class entrants'

acquiescence to the leanings of their socio-cultural habitus that directs them towards an occupation “which is entirely ‘them’” (Bourdieu, 1984, p 223) The limiting influence student teachers’ habitus can have on teacher identity formation is illuminated in Furlong’s (2012) recent study into the influence of life histories and apprenticeships of observation on the formation of Irish student teachers’ idealised identities Furlong (2012) found that a traditional, socially constructed view of teacher identity is still exerting an influence on student teachers’ idealised identities While a progressive view of teaching was found to be dominant, the persistence of more traditional constructions of teacher identity echo the findings of Sugrue’s (1996) research into Irish student primary teachers’ lay theories of teaching Sugrue (1996) found that there was a significant investment on the part of the student teachers in personal identification with teaching, an identification which is reinforced by family and community Their apprenticeships of observation and general socialisation which supported their identification with teaching, implicitly suggested that they were ‘born’ teachers Sugrue (1996) suggests that this social interaction results in a consensus on what particular kind of personality is ideally suited to primary teaching The durability of this perception that there are ‘born’ teachers predisposes pre-service teachers “to the view that they have little to learn from teacher education” (Sugrue, 1996, p 163) The tenacity and pervasive power of student teachers’ lay theories of teaching and pre-service teachers constructed identities (Holt-Reynolds, 1992), and the problematic socially constructed ideas about teaching they articulate (Furlong, 2012, Sugrue, 1996), hastens the need to probe and challenge pre-service and early career teachers’ assumptions about teaching and learning that are formed in their familial and socio-cultural habitus However, if we accept

Bourdieu's assertion that the schemes of the habitus function "beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will" (Bourdieu, 1984, p 466) and that our "ultimate values are never anything other than the primary, primitive dispositions, 'visceral' tastes and distastes, in which the group's most vital interests are embedded" (p 474), then its ability to act as a transformative force appears seriously compromised

In light of the study's concern with social justice, it is incumbent upon this study to highlight the commonsense 'rules' which serve to protect the social status quo and habitus will be central to this process. Paradoxically, the gentle gradient of one's transcend into one's allotted social class can be perceived as being simultaneously limiting and liberating. Liberating in the sense that habitus is 'generative' (of perceptions and practice) and simultaneously structuring (imposing limits upon what is conceivable as perception and practice) (Codd 1990, p 139). Although limited, there is room for choice in the habitus (Reay 1995). It is a means of providing individuals with a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives "without consciously obeying rules explicitly posed as such" (Bourdieu 1990, p 76). In the context of this study, the concept of 'habitus' will help to facilitate an exploration of early career teachers' level of operation below this level of inculcation.

### ***3.5.3 The Transformative Potential of Identity 'Reconstruction'***

Traditionally, teacher identity was viewed as an internal, fixed, and coherent entity (Reeves, 2009). Recent educational research has challenged this perception by providing "rich demonstrations of identity as a relational, socially negotiated process" (Reeves,

2009, p 34, see also Goldstein, 2003, Harklau, 2000, Johnson, 2006, Toohey, 2000, Watson, 2006) This social negotiation of identity is complemented by the power of individual agency (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, Lasky, 2005, Marsh, 2002) The dialectic relationship between self and others, between internal and external, lies at the heart of identity work (Reeves, 2009)

The recognition that identity formation is both socially constructed, and not entirely “passive vis-à-vis the reproduction of dominant class interests” (B Morgan, 2004, p 173), is key in determining the capability of teachers to construct a teacher identity that can extricate itself from the prevailing dominant influences and initiate change The importance of the context in which teachers find themselves working has considerable influence on their identity development (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), and as a consequence on their capacity to become agents of change A Portuguese study (Flores & Day, 2006) highlighted the way a group of teachers went through a process of ‘reconstructing’ their initial identity as teachers in light of the discrepancies they experienced between their assumptions about teaching and the reality of teaching This discrepancy is a common theme found among beginning teachers, particularly among those who commence their careers in marginalised communities Although many of the participants’ identities were destabilised by perceived negative school contexts and cultures, alternatively teachers who worked in supportive, collaborative schools developed and demonstrated more positive attitudes towards learning Not only do these findings highlight the transformative potential of identity ‘reconstruction’, they also



point to the importance of school cultures that encourage beginning teachers to interrogate their assumptions around issues of educational equality

### ***3.5.3.1 The Fluid and Dynamic Nature of Teachers' 'Stories'***

This capacity for identity 'construction' or 'reconstruction' is reflected in the 'stories' that teachers live by. For the purposes of this study, a story is defined as one's narrative of who one is and what one's life has been (Galman, 2009). These guiding narratives reflect the influence of the developmental journey that people have travelled. They are composed over time and in that sense are fluid and dynamic (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Although they are capable of solidifying over time and becoming rigid and unwavering, alternatively they may continue to evolve and reflect the influential nature of the continually changing personal, professional and situational contexts we all experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Rather than being static, these stories are "not only about the past, but is [are] busily about the present as well" (Bruner, 1991, p. 7). In this way they mirror the dynamics of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*.<sup>16</sup> The previously discussed Galman (2009) study illuminates the ability of teachers from lower socio-economic backgrounds to smooth out the rough edges of dissonance they experienced in ITE and construct a 'better story' that was acceptable for themselves. This finding points to the capacity of early career teachers to alter their stories and possibly incorporate a vision of social harmony in their new stories. Dewey's (1938) understanding of experience as 'a moving force' grounded in the context and the interaction that takes place around the situation, is useful in complementing the insight into identity

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<sup>16</sup> 'Habitus' is a complex amalgam of the past and present (Mills, 2008) as the dispositions that constitute the habitus are acquired through a gradual process of inculcation.

development provided by Bourdieu. The connection these experiences have with the entire unity of one's life (Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007) explains the significant influence teachers' 'stories' have on their practice. Experience cannot be separated from the context, highlighting the importance of exploring the prevailing cultural mores that these experiences are grounded in.

#### *3.5.3.2 The Dynamic Potential of the Concept of 'Field'*

Particular practices should not be seen, then, as simply the product of the habitus, but as "the product of the relations between the habitus, on the one hand, and the specific social contexts or 'fields' within which individuals act, on the other" (Thompson 1991, p. 13-14). The conception of 'field' that Bourdieu uses is therefore not to be considered as a field with a fence around it, but rather as a 'field of forces' that is dynamic and in which various potentialities exist (Mahar, Harker, & Wilkes, 1990).

A field is also an arena of struggle, the site of a more or less openly declared struggle for power and influence between the dominant and dominated who are unequally endowed in the objects and the weapons of struggle: capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Agents, therefore, are not 'particles' that are "mechanically pushed and pulled about by external forces" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 108-9). Rather, they are bearers of capital, and as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) state

and depending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy in the field by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) in capital, they [agents]

have a propensity to orient themselves actively either toward the preservation of the distribution of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution (p 108-9)

This capacity to resist the forces of the field (Bourdieu, 1984) which may be constraining early career teachers' desire to be socially agentive in their practice illuminates the transformative potential of this malleable vision of the educational field

Similar to the complexities of the concept of habitus, this interpretation of the dynamics of the field offers clear choices for teachers working within the constraints of the situated context and the system as a whole However, the only partial articulation of the rules or regularities of the field (Grenfell & James, 1998, p 20) acts as a barrier against agentive practice in schools where the orthodox way of thinking and acting is communicated in an implicit and tacit manner

### ***3.5.3.3 The Interaction between Teachers' Personal, Situated and Professional Identities***

The 'regularities of the field' (Grenfell & James, 1998) are made problematic when one considers the relational nature of identity which implies that any interaction is shaped by not only the demands of the context but also by the participants' goals The result of this contextually dependent interaction is the possibility that multiple (and at times conflicting) identities are influencing a single discourse event (De Fina, Bamberg, & Schrifflin, 2006)

Day et al (2006) previously referenced large scale study on teacher effectiveness elaborates on this theme and identified the personal, situated and professional interactions as the core components of teacher identity The personal dimension concentrates on life outside school and is linked to family and social roles

The situated dimension is located in a specific school context and is affected by local conditions (i.e. pupil behaviour, level of 'disadvantage', and support and feedback), while professional identity reflects social and policy expectations of what a good teacher is and the educational ideals of the teacher (Day et al., 2006). This finding highlights the complexity and breadth of one's identity and the significant challenge it presents to researchers. The distinct points of interaction between these personal, situated and professional dimensions to teacher identity provide a dynamic framework for the exploration of early career teachers' identity formation and its influence on practice.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The pervasive influence of liberal theory on teacher identity manifested in the growth of managerial concerns surrounding technical control and efficiency (Troman, 2008) has not only contributed to the growing complexity of teacher identity, but it has also stifled socially agentive action by educators. While teachers are constrained at times by the coercive power relations within their school and the education system at large, they do have some degree of freedom in determining the social and educational goals they want their students to achieve (Reeves, 2009). This chapter argues that these choices present early career teachers with the opportunity to align these social and educational goals with that of a social justice agenda. The recognition that identity is a relational, socially negotiated process offers exciting possibilities for pre-service and early career teachers to construct an identity that can liberate itself from the prevailing dominant influences and make an agentive commitment to social justice and action. It should be

acknowledged that this process of attempting to enhance teacher awareness and commitment to transformative practice is demanding and potentially painful for teachers. However the goal of identity development should not be to transcend discomfort, but rather to embrace it as part of the ongoing emotional labour of confronting one's privilege (De Freitas & McAuley, 2008). Frustration with the reproductive tendencies that they observe in the habitus is necessary to engender more transformative dispositions among early career teachers (Mills, 2008).

## **Chapter Four**

### **Research Approach and Design**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an in-depth description of the research design and its subsequent implementation. It provides a rationale for the use of a phenomenological approach in order to shine light on the professional lived experiences of early career teachers. The role the critical pedagogy and sociology discourses, equality perspectives, and teacher identity literatures played in shaping the research questions is outlined. The choice and appropriateness of a narrative life history approach to exploring early career teachers' understandings of 'making a difference' is discussed. The chapter outlines the socio-educational context for the study and the manner in which participants were selected for the research. A description of the interview sample along with the interview schedule is presented. The role the pilot interviews played in the development of the interview schedule is also outlined. The dual process of data collection and analysis are presented in tandem with the measures employed to ensure their trustworthiness. The chapter concludes by affording due attention to a range of ethical concerns that the research design and implementation presented.

## 4.2 Theoretical Perspective

“Epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate” (Maynard, 1994, p 10) Hence the importance of identifying, explaining and justifying the epistemological stance that informs this research. The research is positioned within a social constructionism epistemology. As outlined in the earlier chapters, the genesis of this research lies in the writings of critical educators such as Michael Apple and Jonathon Kozol, and most particularly in the works of the founder of critical pedagogy - Paulo Freire. Freire’s unwavering belief that knowledge is socially constructed informs the approach taken here, and thus methods that would facilitate dialogue and the generation of new understandings were utilised. The social constructionism we are talking about here is not concerned with creating meaning per se but rather it is concerned with constructing meaning from what already exists in the world. It is an epistemology that assumes that “we have something to work with. What we have to work with is the world and objects in the world” (Crotty, 2003, p 44-5). In these words we discern the philosophical underpinnings of Freire’s pedagogy. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1996), he outlines how true dialogue cannot exist without critical thinking, which he defines as a “thinking that discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and men” (p 64-5). This belief in critical thinking as process and transformation, rather than a static reality informs the theoretical perspective taken in this study.

#### ***4.2.1 Adopting a Phenomenological Approach***

Phenomenological research presumes “that there *are* ‘things themselves’ to visit in our experience, that is, objects to which our understandings relate” (Crotty, 2003, p. 79). This notion of intentionality of consciousness is at the root of phenomenology (Holloway, 1997). The previous chapters have outlined what critical sociology, equality theory and teacher identity literatures have to say about the difference that teachers are making, and could make in social justice terms. Empirical research on the life-worlds of teachers will assist in building a fuller picture of what making a difference means in an Irish context as this is an issue that has received little attention. This study takes a fresh look at teaching and learning in disadvantaged schools by giving voice to the lived experiences of early career teachers. This approach contrasts with traditional quantitative research on test results and achievement that has defined the majority of state commissioned research on pedagogy and teacher effectiveness in designated disadvantaged schools (Eivers, Shiel, & Shortt, 2005, Inspectorate of DES, 2005b, 2011, Weir & Denner, 2013). Rather than interrogating participants’ philosophical and conceptual understandings of the concept in a more abstracted manner, there was an explicit attempt in this study to go ‘back to the things themselves’ (Kruger, 1988, Marshall & Rossman, 2011), by asking early career teachers about what shape the idea of ‘making a difference’ takes in their day-to-day practice. In this way, both researcher and participants were required to make sense of the phenomenon directly and immediately as it presented itself to them as conscious human beings (Crotty, 2003).



Crotty (2003) states what he perceives to be the two clear characteristics of phenomenology

First of all, it has a note of *objectivity* about it. It is in search of objects of experience rather than being content with a description of the experiencing subject. Second, it is an exercise in critique. It calls into question what we take for granted (p. 82-3)

Both these characteristics are in harmony with the focus and aims of this study. Rather than adopting the new, North-American understanding of phenomenology, as one that is primarily concerned with searching for participants' subjective experience of the phenomenon under consideration in order to express it uncritically (Crotty, 1996), this study takes an explicitly critical approach. The importance of research contributing to the development of a theory of emancipatory action through education is one of the core principles on which this study is based. This challenges the researcher to not only understand the social constraints and inequalities in the system, but to also facilitate change (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 28). Within this perspective and in light of their role as educators working in communities that are experiencing intense social challenge, the extent to which early career teachers' explicit and tacit understandings of 'making a difference' were concerned with issues of social justice was deemed to be of critical importance.

Emancipatory research is concerned with developing a reciprocal relationship between the researcher and participants, in which both parties have control, of naming their own world (Baker et al., 2004). In this regard, through their participation in this

phenomenological study, participants were provided with an opportunity to critically reflect upon their own professional role, responsibilities, priorities, beliefs, and vision, and to consider and discuss their own positionality in the social context and its influence on their professional practices

Moreover, as the aim of phenomenological research is to return to the concrete and the “internal experience of being conscious of something” (Holloway, 1997, p 117), it is therefore also about recognising and examining the influence our culture has on us, and the way it shapes the way in which we see things (Crotty, 2003, p 58) Phenomenological research also typically frames the topic of interest as being “processual – being, becoming, understanding and knowing” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p 20) These constituents of phenomenological research are very much a feature of this study’s methodology In order to investigate the role that cultural factors and processes play in shaping the professional identities and felt responsibilities of early career teachers, a narrative life history approach was adopted While the primary focus of the research is on the practices and educational relationships of early career teachers, by initially guiding participants through a biographical account of their journey of becoming and being teacher, a window was provided into the complex amalgam of past and present that constitutes individuals’ habitus (Mills, 2008) As outlined in Chapter Three, such an exploration has the capacity to uncover the language, beliefs, relationships, and values that interact and combine to create teacher identity This shaping of our minds by culture is to be welcomed, as what makes us human, and endows us with the freedom we enjoy However, the limiting as well as liberating

influence individuals' habitus can exert on an unconscious level (Codd, 1990, Reay, 1995) on what teachers define as possible and practical was also of deep interest in such an analysis. In light of the study's emancipatory focus, this exploration also had the parallel aim of uncovering factors at play in the personal, situated and professional dimensions to participants' individual stories that could stimulate and sustain a vision of social justice in their narrative of 'making a difference'.

In order to describe *and* critique the lived experiences of early career teachers, I necessarily drew on language and on culture. In contrast to positivists, phenomenologists believe that the researcher cannot be detached from his/her own presuppositions and that the researcher should not pretend otherwise (Hammersley, 2000). Therefore, it was imperative that I called into question the current meanings I attributed to the phenomenon under investigation. In particular, the phenomenon of reification had to be reckoned with. Reification is the tendency to "take 'the sense we make of things' to be 'the way things are'" (Crotty, 2003, p. 59). While the measures that I put into place to address these issues will be described later in the chapter, it is first important to outline my own life story and how it has influenced my interpretation of meaning.

#### ***4.2.2 Reflexivity and the Research***

My own values and experiences as an educator have shaped the choice of topic, the framing of the research questions and the design of the research. Thus I have a well developed interest in the issue of teacher induction and early socialisation of new,

beginning, and early career stage teachers into the primary teaching profession Through a combination of professional experience as a primary teacher, teacher mentor and facilitator of NIPT professional development courses, and further study, I have been empowered to articulate and develop better understandings of the issues and challenges that teachers face at the beginning of their careers Unarticulated, or tacit knowledge, and explicit knowledge which has been subjected to critical reflection, forms the basis for the interpretation of meaning (Maykut & Moorehouse, 1994) Like the participants in this study, I too began my career in a designated disadvantaged school, and through a process of theoretical and experiential learning, have reached the conclusion that teachers *can* be agents of transformation in the communities in which they work, even if the power to do so is mediated by wider social inequalities and injustices (Keddie, 2012)

#### **4.3 Research Questions**

The interconnected dimensions of critical sociology and pedagogy, equality perspectives and discourse on early career teachers' professional identity shape the framework for this research The purpose of this study is to identify the actions and attitudes that constitute the concept of 'making a difference' amongst a group of early career teachers working in designated disadvantaged schools The issues of 'what' does 'making a difference' look like in terms of these teachers' daily practices, 'why' these interpretations and practices are significant, and 'how' they impact on educational equality are the main concerns that underpin the investigation

These are the research questions that the study sought to address

- What does ‘making a difference’ mean for early career teachers working in urban designated disadvantaged schools in the context of their day-to-day practice?
- What values and practices make them feel like they are ‘making a difference’?
- Do early career teachers have a vision of social justice in their narrative of wanting to ‘make a difference’? If so, what does this vision look like? How is operationalised/channelled?

#### **4.4 Context of the Study**

The appropriateness of focusing the research specifically on the lived experiences of early career teachers working in designated disadvantaged schools is discussed here. The study defines ‘early career teachers’ as those with a minimum of three and a maximum of nine years experience. In the context of this study’s interest in identity formation that can foster teacher agency, this career bracket is worthy of exploration. Research has shown that the practices of teachers within this early career stage are characterised by increased experimentation and activism (Day et al , 2006, Huberman, 1989). Conversely, in the absence of experimentation, teachers in this stage of their careers can be prone to self doubts (Huberman, 1989). It is also a time in teachers’ professional lives during which significant identity growth and change can occur (Day et al , 2006).

As previously discussed, the life-worlds of beginning teachers who start their teaching careers in designated disadvantaged schools has become a topic of interest for Irish researchers. These studies have focused exclusively on teachers in the first five years of teachers' professional lives (Kitching, 2009, Kitching et al, 2009, Morgan, 2011, Morgan & Kitching, 2007, Morgan & O'Leary, 2004, Morgan et al, 2010), and have primarily adopted a psychological focus<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, this study holds the capacity to deepen our knowledge of teachers as they progress deeper into their early stages of their professional lives, as well as viewing it from a critical socio-cultural perspective. As educators working in communities that have experienced inter-generational poverty and social disadvantage, the participants of this study bear witness on a daily basis to the deeply damaging effects of this inequality on the students they teach. Designated disadvantaged schools also tend to hire a relatively high proportion of NQTs (Morgan & O'Leary, 2004). Within this context, the importance of exploring their daily practices and the extent to which they are imbued with, and motivated by a vision of social justice is made apparent.

#### **4.5 Research Design**

In order to address the research questions and to afford primacy to the voices and experiences of the early career teachers themselves, it was deemed most appropriate to adopt a narrative orientated life history approach. As discussed in Section 4.2, the study is shaped by a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially,

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<sup>17</sup> The Inspectorate's report into NQTs' experiences of teacher probation (Inspectorate of DES, 2005a) and the evaluation of the pilot phase of the NIPT (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006) are the other major pieces of research conducted in this area.

lead storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) While the primary focus was on critically rather than subjectively exploring participants' daily practices, it also purposefully set out to explore the orienting influence of individual and class habitus on their stories of becoming and being teachers, and how this has shaped their understandings of 'making a difference' Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) 'three commonplaces of narrative inquiry' – temporality, sociality and place are employed as a framework to outline the justification for using narrative, life history inquiry

### 1 Temporality as a narrative inquiry common place

As a phenomenological study, it was paramount that culturally derived meanings of 'making a difference' were put in abeyance (Crotty, 2003, p 80) and that a critical interrogation of the role habitus and culture in general plays in shaping these understandings was undertaken In order to generate insights into the often intangible and unconscious belief structures that comprise teachers' habitus, it was necessary to know the temporal history of participants' journey to becoming a teacher, something which a narrative life history methodology facilitated Therefore, the intention was not to describe the participants as they are today, but rather to describe them with a past, a present and a future

### 2 Sociality as a narrative inquiry commonplace

According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006), "narrative inquirers are concerned with personal conditions and, at the same time, with social conditions" (p 480) This balance of focus lies at the heart of this study On one hand, this study was deeply interested in

the personal stories of participants and was specifically designed to give voice to the feelings, beliefs, attitudes, desires and moral dispositions of early career teachers. However, it was also concerned with uncovering the social conditions that form the individual participants' context.

### 3 Place as a narrative inquiry commonplace

The third commonplace of a narrative inquiry as outlined by Connelly and Clandinin (2006) is place or sequence of places. By place they mean "the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place where the inquiry and events take place" (p. 28). The specificity of location in the lives of teachers working in designated disadvantaged schools, and the respective schools' cultures that influence their professional experiences, was of central importance to this study. As detailed earlier in Section 4.2.1, how the study's participants perceived their professional role and responsibilities vis-à-vis a vision of social justice was deemed to be of critical interest, in light of their role as educators in communities that are experiencing social disadvantage.

#### *4.5.1 Selection of Participants and Schools*

Early career teachers are the focus of the research and they are the units of analysis for the study. In order to select a sample of early career teachers working in DEIS schools, a non-probability purposive sampling was used. The purposive selection of a group acknowledges the complexity of human and social phenomena and the limits of the generalisability of any such study (Maykut & Moorehouse, 1994, Yin, 2003). The



researcher selected the sample based on his own judgement and purpose of the research (Babbie, 2001), looking for those who “have had the experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched” (Kruger, 1988, p 150) According to Denscombe (2003) purposive sampling exists when “the researcher already knows something about the specific people and deliberately selects particular ones” (p 15) Through professional contacts developed over time through his work as teacher mentor and professional development facilitator, the researcher was afforded the opportunity to identify three schools that had a number of early career teachers on their respective staffs. In order to minimise any potential power differential between researcher and researched during the interview process (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000), a conscious decision was made not to approach any teachers that I had previously engaged with through my work as a professional development facilitator. After making initial telephone contact with the respective school principals, the existence of prospective study participants was confirmed in each of the three schools, and access was granted to distribute information on the proposed study to those teachers meeting the relevant criteria. In this regard, particular attention was afforded to outlining the likely time commitment that participation would require and the range of ethical considerations as detailed in Section 4.10. The prospective participants were also asked to contact the researcher directly in the event that they had any questions or concerns about the proposed research. In an effort to avoid placing any undue pressure on the participants to become involved in the study, follow up contact was made directly with the principal to assess level of interest and willingness to participate in the study. Eighteen participants were selected to

participate in the study and each prospective participant was asked to carefully read a letter of consent (see Appendix A) before signing.

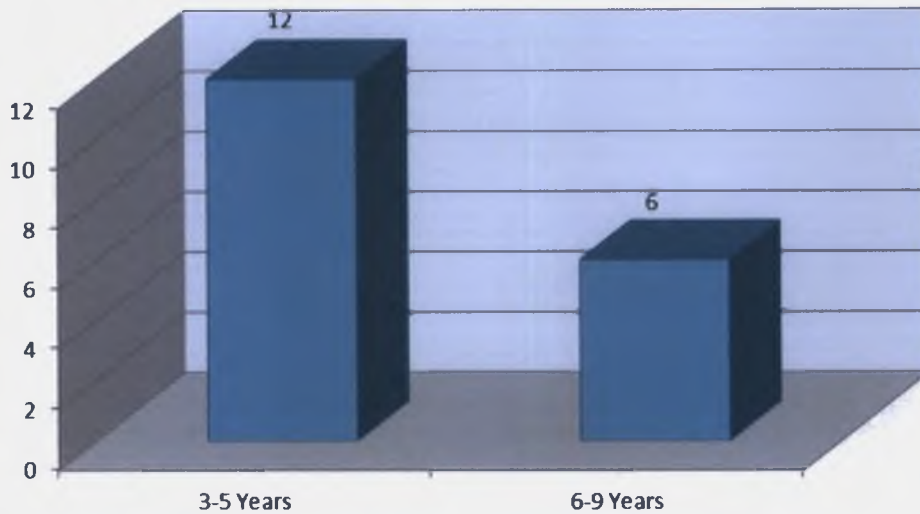
**Table 1: Participants' Biographical Information**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Teaching Qualification</b>	<b>Years Teaching</b>	<b>Current Teaching Position</b>	<b>Social Class/Background</b>
<b>Limefield DEIS 1</b>				
1. Fiona	B.Ed	9	Junior Infants	Close Proximity
2. Bernie	Postgrad	4	Senior Infants	Middle Class
3. Marta	B.Ed	4	Senior Infants	Middle Class
4. Donna	B.Ed	5	Pre-School Educator	Middle Class
5. Moira	B.Ed	4	First Class	Working Class
6. Ciara	B.Ed	3	First Class	Working Class
7. Linda	B.Ed	3	Second Class	Middle Class
<b>Millplace DEIS 1</b>				
8. Hannah	B.Ed	9	Learning Support/Resource	Close Proximity
9. Barbara	Postgrad	3	Fifth Class	Close Proximity
10. Claire	Postgrad	3	Learning Support	Working Class
11. Ryan	B.Ed	5	Sixth Class	Close Proximity
12. Grace	B.Ed	4	Third Class	Close Proximity
13. Frances	B.Ed	9	Learning Support	Middle Class
<b>Tupper DEIS 2</b>				
14. Frank	B.Ed	9	Sixth Class	Middle Class
15. Conor	B.Ed	9	Fifth Class	Middle Class

16. Sarah	Postgrad	4	Fourth Class	Middle Class
17. Leona	B.Ed	3	Senior Infants	Middle Class
18. Anna	Postgrad	7	Senior Infants	Close Proximity

The biographical details of the study's participants are presented in Table 1. In order to ascertain as representative a sample as possible, every effort was made to attain a balance of participants with varying years of teaching experience (within the set parameters) in designated disadvantaged schools (see Figure 1). Traditionally, schools in areas experiencing intense social challenge have experienced constant staff turnover due to the tendency of early career teachers to depart these schools after a relatively short time (Morgan & Kitching, 2007). However, anecdotal evidence would suggest that in recent years the teacher turnover problem in designated disadvantaged schools has been balanced by decreased opportunities for teacher mobility that currently exists within the system. This employment pattern was reflected in the sample, as the researcher had little difficulty identifying DEIS schools that had a number of teachers with between three and five years teaching experience, but found it considerably more challenging to locate DEIS schools that had teachers with between six and nine years teaching experience. Therefore, the sample is reflective of this phenomenon, as it is split along a ratio of 2:1 in favour of those participants with three to five years teaching experience.

**Figure 1: Participants' Years of Teaching Experience**



While the research was primarily concerned with looking at the individual participants and their biographies, obviously the respective school cultures within which they operate make a contribution to their understandings and experiences of 'making a difference'. Every effort was made to ensure that there was a balance of participants from different school types across the DEIS system (see Table 2). The primary aim of this exercise was to facilitate a comparison between the two DEIS categories and the different socio-cultural contexts they encompass. Another contextual factor that influences teaching and learning across the DEIS bands is the differential levels of access to funding and resources.<sup>18</sup> There is also some evidence to suggest that teachers take different approaches in different school and classroom contexts - with more teacher-centred approaches reported in urban DEIS band 1 schools (Mc Coy, Smyth, & Banks, 2012). By drawing participants from both DEIS bands, it facilitated this study to

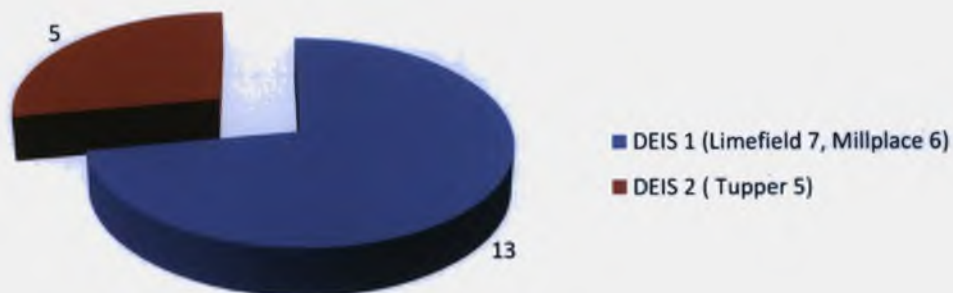
<sup>18</sup> Although both DEIS bands receive extra resources in order to help them address issues of educational inequality, the DEIS 1 schools have lower pupil teacher ratios and can appoint administrative principals on lower enrolment numbers than the DEIS 2 schools. They also receive higher levels of funding than DEIS 2 schools (DES, 2005).

explore the possible effects, if any, of contextual factors on participants' understandings of 'making a difference'. The study's participants were drawn relatively evenly from two urban DEIS 1 schools located in the suburbs of a major city, and one DEIS 2 school located in a provincial town (see Figure 2).

**Table 2: Description of School Sample**

School Name	Description
Limefield N.S. DEIS 1	Junior Primary School (Junior Infants to Second Class)  Co-Educational School  26 Teachers on Staff  Located in a major city
Millplace N.S. DEIS 1	Senior Primary School (Third to Sixth Class)  Co-Educational School  24 Teachers on Staff  Located in a major city
Tupper N.S. DEIS 2	Vertical Primary School  Co- Educational School  24 Teachers on Staff  Located in a large provincial town

**Figure 2: Breakdown of Participants across DEIS Bands**



Taking school level into consideration, the sample was drawn from a junior, senior and vertical school, so participants were teaching in each of the primary class levels. It also contained three teachers that were currently working as learning support/resource teachers, and one pre-school educator. While this greatly added to the diversity of the sample, it is important to note that the focus of the research was not on participants' current teaching assignments per se, rather it was on their individual stories and how the full gamut of their professional experiences so far had contributed to its formation. While the potential contrast between early years and later years primary teachers' understandings of 'making a difference' would be a pertinent topic of further study, because the focus of this research was on the individual as the primary unit of analysis, it was not factored into the analysis process as a major variable.



The group of study participants was limited to 18, and the sample's gender ratio was 15:3 in favour of females, which was representative of the gender split amongst the primary teacher population as a whole (Clarke, 2009; Drudy et al., 2005; Heinz, 2008). The sample also included teachers who had pursued both undergraduate and postgraduate routes into teaching.

Significantly, the sample contained a balance of teachers drawn from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, which was very advantageous considering the emphasis the study places on exploring teachers' habitus and its influence on idealised and realised teacher identities and practices. As illustrated in Figure 3, three categories pertaining to the participants' social background were constructed from the sample. Fifteen of the participants came from a middle class background, while three participants through a process of self-disclosure were identified as having working class origins.<sup>19</sup> Considering the number of middle class participants that grew up in close proximity to the working class communities they now work in, it was decided to create a new 'Close Proximity' category. Throughout the presentation of findings and the concluding chapter, reference is made to 'Working Class-Close Proximity' category as a homogenous construct as these nine participants shared some commonalities in their social upbringing and identity formation. Despite their class differences on some criteria of class, significant commonalities in their stories of 'becoming a teacher' included their

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<sup>19</sup> Three participants (Moir, Ciara and Claire) were classified as originating from working class origins. This deduction was made in light of their own class positioning through reference to their parents' occupations, the working class area that they grew up in, attendance at designated disadvantaged schools, and by positioning themselves as 'mould breakers' through their participation in third level education.

experiences of having attended a designated disadvantaged school,<sup>20</sup> and their reportage of having greater levels of engagement with working class communities than the middle class cohort. Therefore in order to assess the impact of these shared aspects of their socio-cultural histories and early socialization, and their relevance to their understandings of ‘making a difference’, participants from ‘working class’ and ‘close proximity’ backgrounds were made a homogenous construct when analysing the data.

**Figure 3: Social Class/Background of Participants**



<sup>20</sup> Six out of the nine members of the ‘Working Class-Close Proximity’ cohort attended designated disadvantaged schools either at primary level or secondary level.



#### **4. 6 Data Collection Methods**

Qualitative, semi-structured, life history interviews was the research instrument used to gather data. Bechhofer and Paterson (2000, p. 57) believe that the interview should never be chosen as the main research tool until all alternatives have been carefully considered. While consideration was given to a mixed methods approach using participant observations and focus groups in conjunction with interviews, the study's focus on the participants' own understandings of 'making a difference' and their biographies meant that the use of interviews was both legitimate and appropriate (Patton, 1990). The interview is an interactional relationship with both researcher and participants engaged in an ongoing process of making meaning (Kvale, 1996), and because of this its use as the exclusive research instrument was consistent with the study's epistemological underpinnings. The delicate and subtle interactive process of the interview was also well suited to the complex and sensitive personal as well as professional themes that required exploration (McCracken, 1988).

##### ***4.6.1 Interview Structure***

While consideration was given to the use of open-ended interviews, it was decided that the semi-structured one-to-one approach was most appropriate considering the need for a balance between open and more focused questions. As Denscombe (2003) states semi-structured and unstructured styles are really on a continuum and "will slide back and forth the scale" (p. 167), and this was reflected in the structure of the interview schedule (Appendix B).

The interview schedule had two main parts. The start of the interview adopted a biographical focus which required the use of more open-ended questions in order to give the participants scope to describe their individual stories of becoming teachers. The influence of familial and class habitus, significant adults, experiences of schooling and ITE, and other social-cultural factors and processes on their journey to becoming teachers were explored in this section. The second part of the interview required more structured and direct questioning as it focused exclusively on defining what 'making a difference' meant for participants in the context of their day-to-day practices. Specific questions were asked to elicit discussion on the types and nature of pedagogies and educational relationships they engaged in. This section was also concerned with examining the underlying ideologies that influenced these practices and the impact they had on participants' interpretation of their role as educators.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews had the advantage of enabling the participants to respond to the same core questions with the freedom for the interviewer to probe beyond the set list of questions (Brenner, 2006) and to be guided by the responses of the individual participants, allowing them to answer more on their own terms (May, 2001). A conscious effort was also made to incorporate the participants' cultural and personal vocabulary into the questions (Spradley, 1989). In this way conditions were created for individual participants to express their views in their own language, and as a consequence the richness and authenticity of the interviews and the resultant thick description was enhanced. The open-ended nature of the questions that comprised the interview schedule also gave the researcher the opportunity to extend and

clarify participants' responses through probing (Brenner, 2006), and to elaborate on points of interest (Fielding, 1993)

#### ***4.6.2 Piloting of Interviews***

In order to test the effectiveness of the interview schedule and the researcher's own confidence as an interviewer, a small scale pilot of the interview process was conducted. Three early career teachers, all of whom had worked in designated disadvantaged schools, were interviewed. The piloting proved invaluable as one particular section of the interview was altered in light of feedback received from the pilot. The pilot's participants found it extremely difficult to articulate their lay theories of teaching due to the demands that such a process placed on memory recall of apprenticeships of observation. The retrospective nature of participants' accounts of these critically formative experiences, and their propensity to reflect actual ideas about themselves as teachers today was also a factor in altering this aspect of the schedule. Consequently, the focus was shifted towards identifying the role former teachers played in their stories of choosing to become a teacher. A more detailed series of prompts were also developed in response to difficulties the pilot's participants experienced in answering some of the broader, conceptual questions.

#### **4.7 Conducting the Interviews**

The interviews were conducted during the months of April, May and June 2011. They took place in the participants' own classrooms at the conclusion of the school day, as this was deemed the most appropriate venue and arrangement by them. Due to the complexity and breadth of the scope of the interview schedule, each interview lasted approximately one and a quarter hours. Prior to the commencement of the interviews, each participant was reminded of the researcher's commitment to ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. They were further informed that the interview would address matters that the individual participant was willing to discuss. It was also made clear to them that they were free to withdraw from the process at any given point and that they could subsequently request the removal of data relating to them. Time was also allotted for discussion on any questions or concerns participants may have had about the interview process.

Careful consideration was given to the opening phase of the interview and the importance of connecting on a personal level with the participant, an interactional dynamic that is considered essential to the success of the interview (Keats, 2000, McCracken, 1988, Payne, 1999). Prior to the formal engagement with the interview schedule, a discussion was initiated on the classes they had taught previously and their general experiences of the school year up to that point. This approach had the dual effect of relaxing the participants before the commencement of a more in-depth exploration, while also eliciting some valuable background information on each participant.

Throughout the interviews, the researcher was conscious of their interactional nature, and of the reality that they are interpretively active, meaning making processes (Finlay, 2002, Fontana & Frey, 2005), which are sensitive to social construction of knowledge (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, 2002) The researcher was also conscious of the potential pitfall of consciously or unconsciously over managing the interview (Kuhn, 1962) Therefore, selective and appropriate use of active listening strategies such as paraphrasing and empathising were used in order to avoid the interview becoming a stilted and manufactured experience Within this perspective, the researcher encouraged the individual participants to engage in a flow of narrative, which was not interrupted to ask questions in a particular order as laid out in the schedule However, in order to ensure that the main areas of the interview schedule were addressed in the content, the researcher employed the use of a checklist

#### **4.8 Data Analysis**

Throughout the data analysis phase of the research, considerable care was taken to ensure that the concepts and categories used to organise the data and to present the researcher's emerging understandings of the participants' lived experiences spoke sensitively to those self-same experiences While the assumption within phenomenological studies is that individuals are unique and have unique experiences, this study was also strongly committed to examining the essences or essential structures of 'making a difference' as a phenomenon (Giorgi, 1985) across the sample as a whole Through disciplined interaction with the data and the critical discourses outlined in the

review of the literature, the researcher was enabled to develop theoretical ideas about the construct that has relevance beyond the data themselves (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p 163)

As a phenomenological piece of research, the researcher was required to return to the starting point, i.e. the individual participants' stories of 'making a difference' at many points along the research journey (Crotty, 2003). However, this did not preclude the researcher from casting aside the phenomenological mantle at various stages in order to engage with the theoretical, conceptual and policy discourses which provided the necessary direction and organising framework to the analysis process (Dey, 1993). This back and forth engagement with the data and the theory in order to generate new understandings of the phenomenon meant that the constant comparative method of data analysis was employed. This method combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). It also acknowledged the cyclical rather than linear process that the data analysis phase engaged with, which required the researcher to return to the participants' stories with new perspectives as insights were developed. As the analysis of the data proceeded in tandem with the data collection, I became a participant in my own research project, for my own interpretations of the dialogue between researcher and researched became a legitimate object of subsequent analysis (Dey, 1993, p. 37).

#### *4.8.1 The Process and Stages of Data Analysis*

As the individual participant's stories of becoming and being a teacher was the primary unit of analysis, great care was taken to ensure that the transcription process reproduced the full flavour of the interview dialogue. As a narrative analysis, it was important that features of speech such as pauses, repetitions, and intonation were recorded (Silverman, 2001). By typing out the transcripts myself, I was afforded the opportunity to gain acquaintance with the participants' stories, and to make connections between my observation notes and the actual dialogue. At the end of each interview transcription, the entire transcript was read to get a sense of the whole story as told in the words of the participants (Giorgi, 1985).

The next step involved the text of these individual stories being broken down into more manageable units which involved discriminating 'meaning units' with a focus on the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1985, p. 11). An important feature of this process was to ensure that the participants' language and understandings of 'making a difference' were not altered in any way.

It was only when this process was completed, did I engage with my own understandings of the meanings that the participants had attributed to the phenomenon. Through a process of reflection and engagement with the intellectual discourse, I transformed the participants' own expressions and language into academic language which placed the emphasis on the phenomenon being investigated. Each unit of these transformed meanings selected for analysis, was then completed to all other units of

meaning and subsequently grouped, categorised and coded with similar units of meaning. In this way, new categories were formed. This was a conceptual and theoretical activity (Glaser, 1978) as I shuttled back and forth between the participants' meanings and the more general categories that evolved from successive iterations of analysis. This process continued until the category was "saturated", a point reached when new data did not add to the meaning of the general category (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 256).

While the search for connections and relationships between categories was a key concern, due attention was also afforded to partitioning categories, particularly when a category was not relating as well to another category as the study's conceptual framework had led the researcher to expect (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This formed part of a process of continual refinement where initial categories were changed, merged or omitted, new categories were generated, and new relationships were discovered (Goertz & LeCompte, 1984). In order to test the trustworthiness and generality of the findings, and guard against "self-selected biases" (Miles & Huberman, 1994), time was taken to examine the outliers or atypical meanings that were identified and work out what they meant within the context of the findings as a whole.

The second and key stage of the analysis involved looking across the sample as a whole. In so doing, it became possible to identify patterns of shared interpretations of 'making a difference' amongst participants. A number of themes of 'making a difference' were identified along career stage and social background lines. School-



specific factors were found to exert considerable influence on the way participants perceived their professional role and responsibilities. In particular, the influence of school leadership and culture, as well as the socio-cultural context of the school (DEIS categorisation) was a central concern of this second-phase analysis.

Finally, the use of counting helped the researcher to identify, isolate and report on a theme. In this way I agree with Miles and Huberman's (1994) assertion that "when we [qualitative researchers] say something is important or significant or linked we have come to that estimate, in part, by making counts, comparisons, and weights" (p. 253). In this way, counting was employed to help test the robustness of my understandings which were primarily generated through engagement with the data and the associated intellectual discourse.

#### **4.9 Trustworthiness and Generalisability**

As an emancipatory piece of research, great importance is placed on ensuring that the findings presented are trustworthy representations in order to facilitate their potential to make an impression on readers and to be a catalyst for transformative action in education (Eisenhard, 2006, p. 578). While detached research is neither possible, nor desirable (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002), throughout the research process, the researcher endeavoured to note and account for personal bias and preferences around the research topic. In order to attend to this concern and ensure the integrity of the research process, a number of steps were taken.

## 1 The Piloting Process

As previously discussed, the trustworthiness of the study was enhanced by careful piloting of the interview schedule (Silverman, 1993) which shaped and nuanced the final schedule employed in the study. I also carefully maintained a detailed record of interview development and evolution.

## 2 Member Checking

In relation to the interview method, the presence of rhetoric can adversely affect validity (Fielding, 1993). In order to minimise rhetoric, participants were given concise details of their expected role, i.e. as contributors of information in the form of personal experiences and perceptions. Participants were also given the opportunity to view and amend the transcripts, which Bronfenbrenner (1976) classifies as a source of 'phenomenological validity'. No amendments were made by any of the participants.

## 3 Describing the Role of the Researcher

The qualitative, life history interview is very much dependent on the quality of personal interaction. Who the researcher is, and how participants view the researcher is likely to influence the kind of information received in an interview (Brenner, 2006). Therefore, it was important that I provided a description of how the participants may have perceived me. Given the central role I played in mediating all aspects of the research, it was also imperative that I accounted for the impact my own identity and values had in the planning, conducting and analysing of the data (see Section 4.2.2).

#### 4 External Audit Trail

I collected and presented research information in accordance with the six categories of the Halpern audit trail as reproduced by Lincoln & Guba (1985) raw data, data deduction and analysis products, materials relating to intentions and dispositions, and instrument development information. By following this process, the researcher is enabled to walk others through the study, from beginning to end, in order that they understand the journey taken and can assess the trustworthiness of the outcomes.

#### 5 Peer Review

The trustworthiness of research can evidently be increased by working with others. While this was not feasible in the context of the inquiry, my thesis supervisor acted as a peer debriefer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

#### 4.10 Ethical Concerns

As a researcher, one's moral responsibility is to our subjects first, to our study next, and to ourselves last (Punch, 1998). Ensuring that the rights and welfare interests of participants were safeguarded was of paramount importance. As a means of ensuring ethical integrity throughout the research process, an 'ethical protocol' was drawn up to guide the different phases of the research project. This protocol gained the subsequent approval of St. Patrick's College research ethics committee. My thesis supervisor also played an integral part in the monitoring of the project, and ensuring that all ethical protocols had been followed. The issues of informed consent, and confidentiality and

anonymity were the study's central ethical concerns. In light of the due attention that informed consent has received in Sections 4.5.1 and 4.7, this section will focus predominantly on the latter concerns.

A number of measures were put in place to lower the threat to confidentiality. Participants were assured from the outset that all data relating to them in the form of interview recordings, transcripts, researcher notes, and processed data would not be passed on to another person or agency or used in any way which would identify the source. Participants were also informed that this data would be securely stored and that access to this material would be rigorously restricted to myself. However, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity in their fullest meanings proved challenging. In the formal writing of the dissertation, specific quotes from participants were used to provide support for the credibility of the study's findings and conclusions. These inclusions could legitimately be construed as breaking participants' confidentiality, even if their anonymity can be assured. In order to address this ethical dilemma, participants were informed from the outset that every effort would be made to maintain their anonymity but that actual quotes would be included in the written dissertation.

While the varying geographical locations of the school sample lowered the risk to anonymity, the use of a small sample size and a unique population meant that it could not be guaranteed. Therefore, it was explained to the participants that very effort would be made to ensure their anonymity and that of their schools, but that it could not be absolutely guaranteed. A number of measures were also put in place to maximise

participants' anonymity. The names of participants' were not used throughout the interview, and pseudonyms were used in all research records to ensure that identities of the study's participants were protected. A conscious decision was made to reveal only relevant biographical detail in the text of the dissertation. On my part great care was taken in analysing and presenting the data, and scrutinising the details of the context of a situation that might lead to the identity of a participant being revealed.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

The nature of the inquiry, which is underpinned by a phenomenological theoretical perspective and an epistemology of social constructionism, dictated the adoption of a qualitative, narrative life history approach. The use of semi-structured qualitative interviews served to provide a continual flow of personalised and rich stories of the lived experiences of a cohort of eighteen early career teachers working in designated disadvantaged schools. The use of the constant comparative method of data analysis, in tandem with the adherence to the concerns of trustworthiness and the practice of ethical research, served to generate new meanings and understandings about what 'making a difference' meant for the study's participants in the context of their daily practice.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Pathways to Teaching in the DEIS Setting**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In order to explore and understand the factors and processes that shape the professional identities of teachers working in designated disadvantaged schools and their views on ‘making a difference’, a life history approach is adopted, and defined for the purposes of this study as one’s narrative of who one is and what one’s life has been (Galman, 2009). Due to the fluidity and dynamism of these stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) and their capacity to continually evolve, they provide an appropriate lens through which to examine the influence of early career teachers’ upbringing on the formation of an embryonic teaching identity. The ability of teacher identity to change in response to the continually evolving personal, professional and situational contexts that teachers are located within (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) is significant as it provides a context through which participants’ capacity to act as agents of transformative change will be explored in later chapters.

This chapter is in two parts and focuses exclusively on the pre-service experiences of participants and how these experiences influence the development of their professional identities. The various pathways that participants travelled on their journey to becoming qualified primary school teachers is the focus of part one, while the factors influencing

their decision to commence their teaching careers in DEIS schools are discussed in part two

## **5.2 Pathways to Primary Teaching**

The journey taken by participants (N=18) to becoming primary teachers is explored in this first section. In order to identify the factors that influence the development of a teaching identity that is concerned with ‘making a difference’, an evaluation of the influence of significant adults (parents and former teachers) on their ‘stories of becoming a teacher’ was conducted across the teachers’ narratives. The experience of being placed in positions of responsibility as children, and the different pathways to ITE taken by participants, were identified as significant themes for exploration. The results of this analysis were distilled through two central mediating factors: namely the influence of participants’ social class and background, and their views on whether there are ‘born’ teachers who possess a personality ideally suited to primary teaching (Sugrue, 1996).

### ***5.2.1 Parental Influence on Becoming a Primary Teacher***

The majority of participants (16/18) mention explicitly the positive role their own parents played in shaping their educational journey. This finding is broadly in line with Drudy, Martin, Woods, and O’Flynn’s (2002) study that noted that parents had by far the greatest influence on students’ teaching career decisions. Significantly there was little marked differences across class lines, other than the three participants from

working class backgrounds being more expressive in acknowledging the importance that their parents attached to education relative to their middle class counterparts. Their parents' commitment to ensuring their children prioritised their education is attributed by this group of participants to their parents' own lack of educational opportunities, and their subsequent desire for their children to achieve what they were inhibited from accomplishing, as referenced here by Claire

No my Dad would have done his leaving cert but he wouldn't have gone on further than that and my mam, I think she did her junior cert. So my Dad was always like 'education is very important and you have to get an education' and he would have really pushed it, and I think my mam as well because I think she regrets not having done it (Claire 29)

Regardless of their social position, all participants talked about the value their parents placed on education and the high expectations they set for them. Ryan states "from an early age, it was driven into me to go to college, there was an expectation that we were going to college" (Ryan 35)

#### ***5.2.1.1 Participants from Teaching Backgrounds***

An in-depth exploration of middle class parental influence is required due to the fact that 15/18 of the total study sample hailed originally from middle class homes. This section focuses specifically on a sub-group (6/15) of this larger middle class cohort, namely participants from teaching backgrounds. This sub group of six participants (Donna, Hannah, Barbara, Ryan, Frances and Conor) is isolated in order to facilitate a more accurate analysis of their habitus, predicated largely on the influence of their



parents' and other immediate family members' teaching backgrounds. As habitus is a term that "characterises the recurring patterns of social class that are inculcated by everyday experiences within the family, the peer group and the school" (Mills, 2008, p. 80), it is appropriate to confine this analysis to a sub group with homologous family backgrounds due to the study's inability to control for participants' peer groups and schools attended. Significantly this concentration on participants from teaching backgrounds enables one to examine the influence of the leanings of their teaching background and whether it directed them towards an occupation "which is entirely 'them'" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 223). Crucially, it also facilitates an assessment of the influence of their habitus on their decision to become primary teachers, and on the development of their lay understandings of teaching and learning.

Five out of six participants (Donna, Hannah, Barbara, Frances and Conor) from teaching backgrounds felt that immediate family members that were teachers influenced their decision to become primary teachers. Recognising and appreciating the commitment their parents had to teaching, and their ability to sustain their passion for the role throughout their careers, is a common thread running through Conor and Frances' contributions. Conor states

My own father [a primary school principal for forty years] was a very dedicated and a very diligent teacher. You definitely would have memories of somewhere [referring to his family home] where there is constant striving to improve and constant striving to do something productive, something worthwhile. (Conor 18)

Witnessing at first hand the enormous sense of satisfaction and happiness that the profession brings to their siblings made the profession a very enticing prospect for Barbara and Ryan. The enthusiasm it instilled in them is clearly evident in Barbara's following contribution:

Yea it really got me into the idea of becoming a teacher, it sounded like a great job and I could see how happy he was and the rewards that I could see she genuinely was getting from the job. He really did give me the drive to go into it (Barbara 51)

Her mother's love of teaching, and the sustained nature of her commitment to her professional role is referenced by Frances: "she would genuinely even still she would like teaching" (Frances 25). It is evident from these contributions that this vibrant, professionally enriching image of teaching that their family members helped to nurture played a central role in directing them towards teaching as a profession.

The perception that there was a certain element of inevitability attached to this cohort's entry into the teaching profession is encapsulated in Hannah's admission that she "always thought that I [she] would be a teacher" (Hannah 20). A strong sense of familiarity with teaching is a common theme running through their comments, with Frances observing that she was "very much used to being around the schools" (Frances 18). In a similar vein, Donna asserts that she was "aware of the different issues in teaching and maybe the work that the teachers have to do at home and the responsibility of it" (Donna 37). This familiarity and appreciation "of what I was getting myself into" (Conor 08) could be interpreted as this cohort's acquiescence to the

leanings of their familial habitus, and its propensity to direct them towards a profession such as teaching (Bourdieu, 1984)

Both Donna and Conor also talk about choosing primary teaching after considering other third level courses and deciding against them as they felt they had little background knowledge of them Donna's assertion encapsulates the pervasiveness of the influence of their 'teaching background' "I think it may have influenced me probably when I didn't know what I wanted to do" (Donna 39) Teaching as a career is thus considered a 'safe' option to fall back on

### ***5.2.2 The Influence of Participants' Former Teachers***

Former teachers were also identified as another group that significantly influenced participants' initial motivation to become a teacher The ability of former teachers to inspire participants to become teachers is largely attributed to their capacity to relate to their students The primacy afforded to the belief in the importance of having a 'teaching personality' is assessed against this backdrop, as are the resultant consequences this has for the development of participants' educational vision The effect negative experiences of former teachers have on participants is also examined, as is the propensity of these negative experiences to inspire rather than suppress participants' motivation to enter the profession

#### ***5.2.2.1 Premium Placed on Former Teachers' Interpersonal Skills***

The significant influence their former teachers had on their decision to pursue primary teaching as a career is explicitly referenced by 4/18 participants (Fiona, Moira, Sarah and Leona), with Leona's comments reflecting the significance of this influence

They always said that I loved her [infant teacher] and I think that's what made me do it [become a primary teacher], and you wouldn't think that would last all those years but I think it did (Leona 34)

The ability to relate to individual students on a personal level in ways that nurtured their self-esteem and built their self confidence was the most valued teacher characteristic Fiona makes reference to how her former teacher "built up her confidence" (Fiona 24), while Anna and Moira talk about the importance of having a teacher that "believed" (Moira 31) in them. The capacity to instill confidence and belief into students, and to empathise with their personal contexts is a fundamental aspect of the teaching role in the disadvantaged setting (Baker et al , 2004, Fagan, 1995). These capacities are also central to the development of a dialogical classroom (Freire, 1992). However, attaching such importance to their teachers' positive personality traits risks the danger of perpetuating the belief that having a teaching personality is a prerequisite for the task of teaching (Sugrue 1996). This has the knock on effect of downplaying the importance of 'learning to teach' and hastens the need to probe and challenge student teachers' lay theories of teaching that are often socially and pedagogically conservative in their outlook (Boler, 1997, Holt-Reynolds, 1992, Sugrue, 1996).

#### ***5.2.2.2 Negative Experiences of Teachers Fuelling Initial Motivation***

Although the vast majority of participants spoke warmly about their own experiences of primary school and the positive influence it had on their decision to choose primary teaching as their preferential career choice, 4/18 of the participants (Bernie, Ciara, Sarah and Barbara) cited negative experiences of former teachers as contributing to their initial motivation to enter the profession. The desire to create an educational environment that would be the antithesis to these negative experiences appears to be a strong motivating factor.

The strong desire to prove former teachers wrong and exceed what they considered to be the contemptibly low expectations some former teacher had for them is articulated by 2/4 participants (Ciara and Barbara). The insinuation made by a former teacher that her career options would be severely curtailed as a consequence of the area she grew up in, was a strong motivational factor that drove Ciara to achieve academically. Ciara states:

I remember one of the teachers saying to my mam that she didn't know why she [the teacher] bothered when you know all we turn out to be is hairdressers and for trades, and I remember that sticking with me in particular. (Ciara, 20)

This sense of injustice was not limited to participants that attended designated disadvantaged schools as Barbara shares a similar experience to Ciara and talks about wanting to prove a former career guidance teacher wrong by greatly exceeding what she considered to be the baseness of the expectations that teacher had for Barbara's impending leaving certificate examinations. Barbara states "I think that's where it comes from, when you have been in a position yourself when somebody has tried to put you down,

that you try to do whatever you can” (Barbara 203) Again in line with Ciara’s story, she has endeavoured to ensure that she has high expectations for all of the students entrusted into her care. Such awareness of the negative consequences of the role played by low socio-economic status in reducing teachers’ expectations (Boaler, 2000, Hoadley & Ensor, 2009, Lynch & Lodge, 2002, Lyons et al , 2003) can only help in the articulation of an equality conscious teaching vision.

The failure of her teachers to create a caring educational environment was a strong motivating factor in attracting Ciara to the profession. She felt that many of the teachers in her primary school saw their role as limited to ensuring the curriculum was covered, and that their care role was largely neglected. Ciara states “It wasn’t really nurturing, I don’t know, as I suppose it could have been” (Ciara 13), and she bemoans the fact that her teachers “just basically taught you, they didn’t know you” (Ciara 17). Similar to Bernie she felt that this adverse experience inspired her to become a teacher that prioritises the care dimension of the teaching role. Ciara states

I thought that I could make it a bit more nurturing I felt that there wasn’t a great rapport with the teachers and the children whereas I would know a lot about my students (Ciara 15 & 17)

Poverty, social deprivation and difficulties in meeting the day to day challenges of modern life makes it difficult for some parents to attend to their children’s care needs (O’Brien, 2007, 2009), and as a consequence asserts the need for teachers to incorporate an ethic of care into their teaching philosophy (Farrelly, 2009). The necessity of

affirming this need is accentuated bearing in mind the important role a care ethic plays in the development of political consciousness (Held, 2006, Tronto, 1993)

### ***5.2.3 Beating the System - The Capacity of Working Class Teachers to Inspire***

The capacity to show resilience and determination to succeed in an education system whose curricula, syllabi and modes of assessment are heavily biased towards the middle classes (Baker et al, 2004, Drudy & Lynch, 1993, Mac Ruairc, 2009) is reflected in the contributions of the three participants (Moirá, Ciara, Claire) that grew up in working class families. Breaking new ground in relation to career choice was a constant theme running through their contributions. Moirá states “I’m the first person to go to third level education so there were no teachers. It wouldn’t really have been the common thing for a student from my school to become a teacher” (Moirá 19 & 26). A heightened capacity to inspire their students to follow their example coupled with their ability to empathise with students from similar backgrounds to themselves (Fagan, 1995), are just two examples of the positive impact teachers from working class backgrounds can have on students from marginalised communities.

### ***5.2.4 Diverse Career Paths***

The pathways to teaching are becoming increasingly varied and diverse (Coolahan, 2003). This study’s sample reflects this level of diversity with 6/18 participants (Bernie, Donna, Barbara, Claire, Ryan and Anna) having engaged in alternative careers/third level courses prior to commencing ITE. This section examines the motivation behind their decision to choose primary teaching as an alternative to their original career choice.

Barbara and Claire expressed their reluctance to continue in business careers that they felt were highly pressurised and time intensive. Claire states “People were working bank holidays and staying till midnight and I was like I’m not into this. I don’t like what I’m working for, so I left it then” (Claire 10). As well as referencing the huge time demands, Barbara also disliked the promotion culture that encouraged competition for advantage among colleagues and considers it “a cut throat business, there are so many promotions there all of the time and you look out for yourself” (Barbara 21). Barbara’s rejection of the egocentrism required to be successful in ‘cut throat business’, and the negative impact she considers ‘careerism’ having on her personal life, is also reflected in Bernie favouring primary teaching as a career in light of its perceived compatibility with family life. “I don’t want a seven to seven job so the whole idea of the school holidays and the whole timetabling suits a family life well” (Bernie 40). Troman’s (2008) claim concerning the increased importance the new generation of teachers place on time compatibility for family-friendly work and child care is echoed in these comments.

Ryan’s quest to find a ‘better fit’ with his personality is indicative of a personal identification with teaching. This personalisation of teaching is made problematic due to its capacity to perpetuate the notion that some are ‘born’ teachers with little to learn (Sugrue, 1996). Ryan’s desire to change university courses was sparked by his perception of primary teaching as a less stressful alternative to a career in law, and one that would be more compatible with his personality. Ryan states



It [law course] was very stressful and I knew that this isn't what I want to do for the rest of my life, and because I was enjoying the work in Martins [local soccer club] at the time, I said, well listen, I will work with kids because that's what I like doing (Ryan 53)

The perception that primary teaching is an 'available' career option to fall back on also helps to perpetuate a personal identification with teaching. Anna and Donna's story reflects a journey taken by a number of entrants who worked as 'unqualified' teachers prior to commencing ITE. After dropping out of a number of third level courses, Donna's circumstances led her to gain employment as an unqualified teacher in a local country primary school, while upon qualification as a secondary teacher, Anna gained employment as a substitute teacher in her local school "just to tie me over" (Anna 03). The positive feedback they got from teachers with whom they worked helped convince them that they had the requisite personal qualities required to be a teacher, with Donna stating "I had a great time and everyone kept saying you're brilliant you know, would you not do teaching?" (Donna 42). In the absence of any formal teacher training, receipt of such praise may help reinforce the perception that primary teaching is an 'available' career option, thereby assisting in the perpetuation of "the misconception that any smart person can teach" (Fullan, 1993, p. 111).

### ***5.2.5 Quasi-Teaching Experiences***

While more formalised classroom experiences, such as engaging in work experience programmes in primary schools were central in sparking Marta and Linda's interest in teaching, being placed or placing themselves in what Sugrue (1996) refers to as "quasi-

teaching” situations was another aspect of participants’ educational experience that triggered their desire to become primary teachers. Sugrue (1996) defines these quasi-teaching, or atypical teaching episodes, as encounters that “take the form of helping younger siblings with homework, teaching music, giving tuition to less able peers in school, looking after the reception class during recess and babysitting” (p. 159). Linda’s account of how she enjoyed the responsibility attached to ‘minding’ younger children during lunch time, and the role it played in encouraging her to become a teacher, is an example of how these quasi-teaching experiences can influence career choice. The positive experiences garnered from babysitting helped assure Linda and Bernie that they had the requisite qualities to be successful teachers. Linda states: “So I knew that I always liked that [babysitting] and because of that I knew that I had patience with children” (Linda: 38). The positive self-worth that these prospective teachers received from the quasi-teaching roles they occupied has the capacity to bolster a perception of themselves as people that can be trusted and can maintain control (Sugrue, 1996). While evidence suggests that experiences of positive emotions can help individuals to become “more creative, knowledgeable, resilient, socially integrated and healthy individuals” (Fredrickson, 2004, p. 1369), such a construction of self around teaching (Sugrue, 1996) which places a premium on the possession of expert knowledge and control also has the potential to adversely effect the development of a vision of social justice. The caring dimension to babysitting, a role that is almost exclusively assigned to young females, also has the capacity to perpetuate a patriarchal discourse which links caring to femininity (Vogt, 2002).

### 5.3 Pathways to Teaching in the DEIS Setting: The Fear of the Unknown

The journey to becoming a primary teacher in schools serving marginalised communities provides the focus for the second part of this chapter. Before such an analysis commences, it is important to note the interchangeable use of the terms ‘designated disadvantaged’ and ‘DEIS’ by participants when referring to schools that participate in the DEIS ‘Action Plan for Educational Inclusion’ (DES, 2005). As previously discussed in the literature review, if one internalises the dictionary definition of ‘disadvantages’ and perceive them to be “the leftovers from the table of the advantaging society” (Derman-Sparks, 2002, p. 60), then one’s ability as an educator to see people from ‘disadvantaged’ communities or ‘DEIS’ schools as equal partners in the educational process is severely compromised. Initiatives such as DEIS are predicated on the belief that it is the person, school, or community that needs to be changed, not the broader education or economic systems (O’Sullivan, 1999). The process of classification is essentially a political act (Stone, 2002), giving advantage to some and disadvantaging the remainder. The political origins of the term also make it impossible to analyse social class inequality in terms of structurally determined disadvantage (Drudy & Lynch, 1993). Bearing this in mind and in light of the pervasiveness of its use by participants when referring to the children they teach, and the communities that they serve, the aforementioned terms will be reserved solely to reference participants’ direct usage, or when referring specifically to the DES structures aimed at addressing educational inequality.

Consistent with the aim of the first section, the identification of factors that influence the development of a teaching identity that is concerned with social justice is prioritised. In particular, this section examines the relationship between the level of engagement participants had with working class communities in their youth and during the course of ITE, and the effect it had on their perceptions of working in designated disadvantaged schools.

### ***5.3.1 The Experiential Deficit and its Impact on Attitudes towards Working in Marginalised Communities***

Some participants' limited awareness of DEIS structures, and the minimal consideration they gave to the setting they wished to work in, reflects their limited engagement with working class communities in their youth, and during the course of ITE. A work environment that militated against NQTs making informed career decisions is also identified as another inhibitive factor. An appropriate place to start this exploration is with those participants that initially expressed reluctance to work in schools serving marginalised communities.

#### ***5.3.1.1 Not Wishing to Teach in Working Class Areas***

Five of the eighteen participants (Linda, Barbara, Grace, Frances and Frank) were explicit in outlining their initial wish to avoid teaching in a designated disadvantaged school. Barbara states "A friend of mine said that I would be really suited to disadvantage and I honestly thought no chance in the world do I want to teach in a disadvantaged school" (Barbara 01). The many factors that often combine to warn

NQTs away from seeking employment in working class schools are illuminated by Frank. After admitting that teaching in a designated disadvantaged school “wasn’t on my wish” (Frank 04), he alludes to his very sheltered, rural upbringing that closeted him from working class communities. Frank states “You probably have an awful lot of student teachers who were like me, who came from a very sheltered background, a rural background, totally far removed from DEIS Band 1 and DEIS Band 2” (Frank 81). Frank experienced a sense of stepping into the unknown while on teaching practice in an urban DEIS 1 school and this resulted in him feeling “slightly intimidated by it all” (Frank 82). These findings concur with the aforementioned Leavy (2005) study that highlighted that many pre-service teachers, the majority of whom are white, rural, middle class and Catholic, prefer to teach in schools where children are from backgrounds similar to themselves.

#### ***5.3.1.2 Lack of Awareness of DEIS Structures***

This experiential deficit articulated by Frank is reflected in Fiona and Grace’s admission that as first time job seekers, they were unaware that some schools had designated disadvantaged status. Fiona, for example, candidly admitted that despite participating on the educational disadvantage elective during her ITE, and having also been on teaching practice in DEIS schools, she remained ignorant to not only how schools are assigned DEIS status, but to the very existence of DEIS. Fiona states

In fact doing the elective I don’t know did I even know what DEIS stood for, and you know even when I started here, and there was DEIS 1 and DEIS 2 and it was always being thrown around, I didn’t understand (Fiona 03)

These findings are encapsulated in Grace's sense of exasperation at the expectation of being au fait with the DEIS model "like I didn't know what DEIS meant why would you like?" (Grace 253) and points to the failure of ITE to raise participants' awareness of the systems in place to address social and educational inequality. Consequently, in light of their ignorance to the presence of DES initiatives to address educational inequality, 4/18 participants (Grace, Marta, Frank and Frances) remained unaware of the type of school they were securing employment in. Frances states "So I was very unaware of it [designated disadvantaged status] coming out and even when N [Principal] told me it was a disadvantaged school I still didn't actually know what that meant to be honest" (Frances 04). Questions must also be raised about efforts made by the respective schools to fully inform prospective employees of the context they would find themselves working in, and the time given to identifying candidates' knowledge of teaching in areas in designated disadvantaged school. These findings also concur with Leavy's (2005) findings that conclusively show that pre-service teachers have minimal contact with people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and as a consequence bring little cross-cultural knowledge, background and experience with them on entry to college (Larke, 1990, Valli, 1995). With such limited awareness of the DEIS model, it is therefore inevitable that many participants put little thought into the type of school they wanted to work in.

In fact not knowing that their new schools had designated disadvantaged status was considered to be a positive by Grace and Frank, as they both concurred that if they had been aware of their respective schools' DEIS status prior to securing their new

employment, they probably would have been reluctant to apply for positions in their present schools. Grace states “Possibly if I had have known that it might have [designated disadvantaged status] in college, it might have turned me off” (Grace 08). Frances also feels that this distinct lack of awareness was to her benefit “I came into it very naive I suppose to what I was walking into but it was probably the best way in some ways” (Frances 04), as it left her free of the influence of negative assumptions about teaching in a designated disadvantaged school that are often cultivated in the middle class habitus.

### ***5.3.2 Employment Environment Militating Against NQTs Making Considered Career Choices***

Schools’ failure to strictly adhere to formal recruitment procedures, largely due to their anxiousness to ensure that they had qualified teachers on their staff, militated against many of the participants making considered career choices. The practice of appointing teachers outside of the formal interview structure is one that is mentioned by 3/18 participants (Fiona, Donna and Hannah), while 2/18 participants (Grace and Linda) refer to staff members either promising them a position (Grace), or in Linda’s case been strongly encouraged to apply for a position. During the early to middle 2000’s there was a dearth of qualified primary teachers in Ireland and as a consequence schools serving marginalised communities experienced considerable difficulty attracting teaching graduates to their ranks, resulting in the need to hire un-trained personnel (Gilligan, 2002, Morgan & Kitching, 2007). This situation was exacerbated by the increase in the number of vacancies in these schools due to the creation of new teaching positions in the

SEN area (Linnane, 2005) It should also be noted that these irregular recruitment practices were reported exclusively by participants in DEIS Band 1 schools reflecting the greater difficulty these schools experienced in relation to teacher recruitment and retention

Such a scenario meant that new graduates experienced a very hospitable employment environment, a fact acknowledged by Donna “I graduated in 2005 and it was just coming to that time where teachers had their pick of schools and turnover was high, particularly in disadvantaged schools” (Donna 01) These favourable employment conditions may partially explain why there is evidence to suggest that formal appointment procedures were not strictly adhered to, and that schools anxious to fill their teaching rosters with qualified staff often resorted to less than transparent recruitment practices Participants report being offered jobs without applying for them “I didn’t apply for the school I got a call about this school from the principal and yea that’s how I [got the job]” (Fiona 02), without doing an interview “I was offered the day I got the job where I teach I literally did no interview for my job” (Hannah 03), and in Donna’s case, without even realising that she had completed an interview “They just said call into the school, and by the time I was finished they had handed me a form that I had no idea about It was a temporary position So I had just done an interview and didn’t realise it” (Donna 01) The informal, almost clandestine manner of the process, coupled with the speed at which the recruitment process was carried out, assumedly heaped considerable pressure on NQTs such as Donna to accept a position NQTs unfamiliar with appointment procedures and their entitlements, allied with their lack of



awareness of the type of school they were seeking employment in ended up accepting teaching positions without having fully considered all of their options

A less hospitable employment environment that existed from the mid 2000s onwards also militated against participants making considered and informed career choices. As employment opportunities started to steadily decline, participants that graduated during this period experienced considerable difficulty in gaining employment in any setting. For 4/18 participants (Bernie, Donna, Ryan and Leona) the pressure to secure full time employment superseded any preference to work in a particular school/area. Bernie states "At that stage it was literally out of college, CVs every where and who got back to me I didn't think about it too much" (Bernie 01), while Leona refers to the perceived need "to take what you got" (Leona 01). Consequently 3/18 participants refer to using their social capital to aid their efforts in securing employment. Ryan, Frances and Anna's contributions suggest that 'insider' knowledge provided a considerable boost to their employment prospects. Ryan states "I had known N [Principal] through the soccer club and he would have known my mother more than me. So he took me over, I had an interview and then on we went from there" (Ryan 02 & 03). Frances tells of a similar experience of a friend alerting her to a possible position in the school and the role the principal's previous knowledge of her played in paving the way for her to successfully gain employment in her present school. This reliance on contacts meant that some participants applied for positions in an ad hoc manner. Consequently securing a teaching position in the DEIS setting was often less a considered choice and more one made out of necessity.

### ***5.3.3 The Role of Prior Experience in Fostering a Positive Attitude towards Teaching in Working Class Areas***

Participant interaction with working class communities during their youth, and subsequently during the course of their ITE, helped participants develop a positive attitude towards working with children from marginalised communities. This experience empowered participants to interrogate their unchallenged assumptions in relation to working in designated disadvantaged schools, and in the process helped them to overcome reservations they may have had about accepting such positions.

Six of the eighteen participants (Moirá, Ciara, Claire, Grace, Ryan and Anna) attended designated disadvantaged schools either at primary or post-primary level, and this experience seems to have instilled in them an appetite to ‘put something back’ into schools that serve marginalised communities. Moirá, Ryan and Anna state:

I knew that I was going to work in a school in a tough area. (Moirá 09)

I certainly was more interested in working in a disadvantaged area. That’s where I wanted to be. Well part of it was coming back to my home town and doing work there in a community that I felt that I was part of. (Ryan 06 & 38)

It was just familiarity and probably the loyalty to the school that once I started subbing I was eager to get back. When I finished my post grad I was eager to get back. (Anna 07)

Both Moirá and Grace appear to be acutely aware of the importance of acting as positive role models for the children in their school. Grace talks about encouraging her students to follow her example: “Yea it’s brilliant for them to see, well she went to school here”

(Grace 108), while Moira expresses her desire to “set an example that I just came from a normal place like them and that I could decide that I wanted to be a teacher and that I went to college after school” (Moira 123). The working class participants’ narratives tell a story of upward social mobility, achieved through their entry into the professional classes. The complexity of their habitus, an amalgam of their past life as a working class student who succeeded often against the odds, and their present lives as middle class professionals is reflected in their motivation to project themselves as role models. While their desire to ‘make a difference’ is consistent with Galman’s (2009) findings which found that teachers from lower social classes have a heightened capacity to construct an identity that is agentic in focus, their legitimisation of a meritocratic system that implies that success or failure at school is a function of what the individual is or does (Drudy & Lynch, 1993), is potentially problematic in terms of their capacity to be agents of radical change within the system.

#### ***5.3.4 Pre-Service Teaching Experience Helping Early Career Teachers to Overcome Initial Reservations***

The level of their pre-service engagement with students and teachers in schools located in working class areas was identified by participants as central to the development of their positive attitude towards working in the DEIS setting. Participation on elective modules focusing on the theme of educational inequality, and teaching practice assignments in DEIS schools, were almost universally considered by participants to be positive experiences. As well as raising their awareness of structures designed to address educational inequality, perhaps more importantly, the experience of

working with students and teachers helped to initiate a period of inward reflection that helped to foster a positive disposition towards working with children from working class backgrounds and indeed other cultural groups

#### *5.3.4.1 The Influence of Positive Experiences on Teaching Practice*

Completing teaching practice modules in designated disadvantaged schools was identified by 9/18 of the participants (Fiona, Donna, Lmda, Hannah, Claire, Grace, Frank, Leona and Anna) as being a very positive experience. Significantly 4/9 participants (Linda, Grace, Frank and Leona) felt that their ability to overcome their initial reservations about teaching in working class areas was predicated on teaching contact with the setting prior to qualification. Linda and Grace state

I guess from teaching in that school I knew what it was going to be like, and it was a really good experience, so I definitely wanted to, if possible, to teach in a DEIS school (Lmda 14)

I suppose you did kind of say ‘oh God, that might be tough now’ but that said, all my experiences from here in Millplace from the previous year had always been great (Grace 12)

While the development of a positive attitude towards teaching in working class areas is essential for engagement with liberating pedagogies, the motivation behind such a wish requires critical reflection. Linda’s desire to teach “in a DEIS school” (Linda 14), and Grace’s initial fears about teaching in a working class area reflected in her comment “oh God, that might be tough now” (Grace 12), highlights the need for ITE to challenge assumptions formed in the middle class habitus

In contrast to some participants' lack of awareness of DEIS structures (see Section 5.3.1.2), those participants that had successive teaching practice placements in designated disadvantaged schools (Donna, Linda and Anna) reported having good knowledge of the structures in place to address educational inequality. Donna states "I knew what they were talking about when they were saying that we have DEIS status and I kind of knew the type of school" (Donna 03). The central role exposure to teaching in designated disadvantaged schools had in encouraging them to specifically target employment in the setting is also highlighted by Linda and Anna. These positive effects of gaining teaching experience in schools serving marginalised communities during ITE reaffirms the need to make school placements in designated disadvantaged schools an integral and mandatory part of the new school placement programme.

Bernie and Hannah's positive experiences of interacting with working class parents during teaching practice encouraged them to target employment in working class communities in preference to middle class areas. This positive attitude is in stark contrast to the pressure Bernie felt from parents during teaching practice modules in middle class schools. She cites this negative experience as the primary reason for her not wishing to pursue employment in a middle class school. Bernie states "There was an awful lot of criticism of homework or this or that, so I found that a bit too much. Yea, I just thought I was getting given out to by a lot of parents" (Bernie 04 & 05). This pressurised environment contrasted with her experience of parental involvement in the designated disadvantaged school where she completed teaching practice.

The other DEIS school was a city centre school and it was a 'Breaking the Cycle' [DES initiative to address educational inequality] school and I suppose I liked the parent involvement which I said that I didn't like [parental involvement in middle class school], but it was in a very different way. It was very supportive (Bernie 07)

In line with Bernie's narrative, Hannah perceived her impending employment in the DEIS setting as been one where the pressure to 'perform' would not be as intense compared to working in a middle class area. Hannah states

I had been there on teaching practice and actually the reason I didn't go for Knockbridge [urban middle class school from whom she had received a job offer] I had been there subbing for a few weeks and there's a lot of really 'my mommy says' and 'my daddy says' you know that sort of thing so I said no (Hannah 07)<sup>21</sup>

Bernie and Hannah's contrasting experiences of working with parents in the different settings not only indicates a preference towards working class parents whom they perceive to be less scrutinising of teachers' 'performance' but also reflects their shared concern about the increased capacity of middle class parents to exert pressure on teachers in light of their greater accumulation of cultural capital. Conversely their positive attitude towards parental involvement in DEIS schools helps both parties to

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<sup>21</sup> Hannah's disparaging reference to her experience of middle class parents ("there's a lot of really 'my mommy says' and 'my daddy says'") is reflective of the increasing pressure on teachers to justify their judgments and actions (Troman, 2008). NQTs are particularly prone to being unduly influenced by such pressure, which is invariably intensified in middle class areas due to the capacity of parents to use their social, economic and cultural advantages to exercise more control on how schools operate (Archer 2001, Hannan, Smyth, McCullagh, O'Leary, & McMahon, 1996)

understand differences, and ultimately facilitates the democratising of power relations between teachers and parents (Baker et al , 2004)

#### ***5.3.4.2 Positive Influence of Pre-Service Electives***

There was largely undivided praise (Fiona, Moira, Conor and Leona) for the positive influence of elective modules focusing on the theme of educational inequality offered in many of the colleges of education<sup>22</sup> In line with positive experiences of teaching practice, participation and engagement with these programmes appears to have raised their consciousness in relation to the possibility of working in DEIS schools Fiona states “I had done my elective in educational disadvantage so I suppose, I had that on the brain a bit, that I liked the challenge of disadvantage” (Fiona 01) Participation on the elective, allied with her involvement in voluntary work in a marginalised community further nourished Moira’s desire to eventually teach in the DEIS setting “I remember I kind of started getting it into my head to do volunteer work and doing that option [elective], that I would like to work in an area of disadvantage” (Moira 03) This finding reiterates the need for all teacher education programmes to not only offer modules dealing explicitly with the issue of teaching in the disadvantaged setting (EDC, 2004, Government of Ireland, 2002b), but to make it a compulsory element of their programmes The ability of these programmes to promote a culture of critical reflection that creates social dissonance (Galman, 2009), and challenge the aforementioned ‘inscribed habits of inattention’ (Boler, 1997) that a more functionalist approach

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<sup>22</sup> Marta admits that the elective made little impact on her apart from raising her awareness of the extra resources that participation in DEIS ensured, while Fiona admitted that she remained ignorant to the organisational structure of the education system in relation to educational disadvantage despite her participation on the module

facilitates is of utmost importance. This need is amplified considering that social and cultural dissonance is widely acknowledged as a prerequisite for engagement with issues of social justice (Boler & Zembylas, 2003)

A particularly beneficial dimension of the electives identified by participants was the opportunity it afforded them to work with children. Fiona relished the opportunity to visit schools in marginalised communities, and her involvement in establishing a school choir reflected her initial desire to contribute to the school and local community. Leona's participation on the elective helped to develop her understanding of the everyday realities that many children unfortunately have to face in coping with schooling, and emphasised the importance of teachers being empathetic of children's concerns and needs. Leona states:

It was just really interesting to see what the kids see everyday and they were like you know, if those kids come into school at half ten you shouldn't be giving out to them. They are in school like and probably God knows what they have seen at home. Yea it gave a lot of understanding towards them and where they might be coming from. (Leona 51 & 80)

While the development of an empathetic disposition is central to the development of a trusting relationship with children (Held, 2006), Leona's concern about "God knows what they have seen at home" (Leona 80) raises questions about the influence of her middle class habitus, and its propensity to reinforce class and professional based judgements of working class parents and their influence on their children.



The opportunity to engage in discussions with teachers and other professionals was highlighted as of particular benefit by both Leona and Conor. Listening to people working at ground level proved to be an extremely interesting and motivating influence for Leona.

You had to go out to the schools, once a week for say six weeks. Speakers came in and you know social workers and stuff and they were just absolutely fabulous. I know it sounds stupid but they were so interesting. (Leona 49 & 50)

The benefits of seeing at first hand the collaborative nature of staff relations in many schools is highlighted by Conor. “I enjoyed it and the way the school was run it seemed to be all pulling together. There was a good atmosphere in the schools” (Conor 04). This finding affirms the importance of teacher education providers creating structured opportunities for student teachers to engage in a meaningful way with the whole staff of the school during their teaching practice placements. The recent reconceptualisation of the school placement experience in ITE offers exciting opportunities in this regard (Ní Áingléis, Murphy, & Ruane, 2012).

#### ***5.3.4.3 Demystifying ‘DEIS’ Schools***

Perhaps more than anything else, the experience of gaining access to such rich learning experiences in schools located in marginalised communities, removed a mystique that surrounds designated disadvantaged schools for many new entrants to the profession. This is significant considering that the majority of new entrants continue to hail predominantly from middle class backgrounds (Coolahan, 2003, Drudy et al., 2005), and as a consequence are often unfamiliar with working class areas. Leona felt “it

opened my eyes to lots of things” (Leona 75) and she began to realise “that it doesn’t make a difference if they are this, that or the other” (Leona 79) This focus on distinctions hints at the very essence of middle class habitus that can serve to distance the middle class from lower socio-economic groups (Bourdieu, 1984) Leona’s questioning of her assumptions formed in the habitus, and the dominance of middle class values in education is indicative of someone beginning to reflect on the influence of middle class values on the Irish education system

## **5.4 Conclusion**

Adopting a life history approach, this chapter explored the various pathways travelled by participants on their journey to entering pre-service teacher education, and then their progression to working in designated disadvantaged schools This chapter identified a range of factors that influence the development of a teaching identity that is concerned with pursuing a vision of social justice The influence of significant adults was found to have a considerable influence on the development of participants’ embryonic teaching identities While the participants from working class backgrounds were particularly expressive in acknowledging the role their own parents played in their story of upward social mobility, the influence of the middle class habitus of the majority of the sample was found to have both positive and negative influence on their lay views of teaching The in-depth focus on the cohort of participants from teaching backgrounds also reveals the positive influence their parents’ projection of a vibrant, professionally

enriching image of teaching as a career, had on this cohort's decision to pursue a career in primary teaching

However on the negative side, their general socialisation as members of 'teaching families' was found to create a certain element of inevitability around their entry into the profession. Their career choice could therefore be interpreted as evidence of their acquiescence to the leanings of their habitus, a development that runs the risk of implicitly suggesting that they are 'born' teachers (Sugrue, 1996). Former teachers were also identified as another group that significantly influenced participants' initial motivation to become a teacher. The importance the sample as a whole attach to former teachers' positive personality traits further risks the danger of perpetuating the belief that a teaching personality is a prerequisite for the task of teaching (Sugrue, 1996). The perception that teaching is a personality driven pursuit is also in evidence in the motivation behind the decision of some participants to change careers and choose primary teaching as an alternative career. A desire to find a career that is a better 'fit' with their personalities and family life, coupled with the perception that primary teaching is an 'available' career option to fall back on, also assists in the perpetuation of the misperception that any intelligent can perform the duties of a teacher (Fullan, 1993), and the knock on effect this has on downplaying the importance of 'learning to teach'. Their placement in quasi-teaching situations was another aspect of participants' educational experience that triggered their desire to become primary teachers. While these experiences are reflected upon positively by participants, such a construction of self around teaching which places a premium on the possession of expert knowledge and

control also has the potential to adversely effect the development of a vision of social justice

While these findings emphasise the importance of probing and challenging student teachers' lay theories of teaching that are often socially and pedagogically conservative in their outlook (Boler, 1997, Furlong, 2012, Holt-Reynolds, 1992, Sugrue, 1996), the findings also point to the role pre-service experiences of interacting with working class children and other cultural groups can play in fostering a positive attitude amongst participants towards working in marginalised communities. This experience was found to be instrumental in empowering participants to interrogate their often unchallenged assumptions in relation to working in such communities, and in the process this allowed them to overcome reservations they may have had about accepting such positions. Conversely, an absence of such knowledge and experience meant that many participants accepted positions without being aware of the designated disadvantaged status of their new schools. Negative attitudes towards the prospect of working in working class areas are more prominent among participants that had little engagement with the setting prior to qualification.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Pedagogies of Sameness and Care**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

While conscious that ‘making a difference’ can mean many things to teachers, this study is interested in what ‘making a difference’ means for early career teachers working in designated disadvantaged schools, and what shape it takes in their day-to-day practice. In light of their role as educators working in communities that are experiencing intense social challenge, the extent to which early career teachers’ explicit and tacit understandings of ‘making a difference’ are concerned with social justice is deemed to be of critical interest. This chapter focuses exclusively on participants’ daily practices and contextualises their perception of their ability to incorporate a social justice agenda into their understanding of ‘making a difference’. Central to realising a vision of social justice is an educator’s commitment to ‘praxis’ - a combination of both action and reflection which achieves a powerful and liberating force (Freire, 1996). A philosophy of praxis is based on the premise that people’s previous experiences must be the starting point for new learning. Here participant commitment to a justice praxis is explored in relation to the following four themes that emerged from the data:

- 1 Liberating pedagogies,
- 2 A devolved, power sharing approach to classroom management,
- 3 An ethic of care that is conscious of achieving the balance between supporting students, and making enough intellectual demands of them,
- 4 Working with and valuing of diversity

## 6.2 Liberating Pedagogies

The need to make their students' educational experience a more thought provoking and engaging experience is a consistent theme running through 16/18 participants' contributions. Attempting to make education a more socially and culturally relevant experience is identified as one of the primary ways of achieving this expressed objective. This first section assesses participant engagement with this concern, as expressed in their accounts of their daily practice. An analysis of participant commitment to pedagogies that are 'connected' with students' life experiences (Lingard & Keddle, 2013) is conducted across the following three dimensions of praxis derived from the data:

- 1 Promoting experiential learning,
- 2 Implementing a holistic approach to the development of students,
- 3 Developing students' critical thinking skills

An analysis of participants' accounts of their daily practice found that with the exceptions of Bernie and Hannah who failed to engage with any of the three sub themes, 16/18 participants expressed some level of engagement with at least one of the three themes (see Table 3). The strength of this engagement is dispersed along a continuum of commitment. Six out of the total cohort of eighteen participants demonstrate 'modest commitment' levels, referencing only one of the three sub themes, 8/18 participants express 'good commitment' as they make reference to two of the three themes, while

‘strong commitment’ is confined to only 2/18 of the participants who discuss their engagement with all three themes.

**Table 3: Level of Participant Commitment to ‘Liberating Pedagogies’**

<b>Commitment Level</b>	<b>Participants (N=18)</b>
<b>Strong Commitment</b>	2/18 (Barbara and Leona)
<b>Good Commitment</b>	8/18 (Donna, Moira, Linda, Claire, Grace, Frances, Frank and Sarah)
<b>Modest Commitment</b>	6/18 (Fiona, Marta, Ciara, Ryan, Conor and Anna)
<b>No Evidence of Commitment</b>	2/18 (Bernie and Hannah)

### ***6.2.1 Promoting Experiential Learning***

Just over half of the participants (10/18) (Donna, Marta, Frances, Claire, Grace, Barbara, Frank, Leona, Sarah and Anna) reference the importance of basing their teaching on the contextually relevant interests and experiences of their students. The ways in which participants pursue this objective include their willingness to lead by example and open up their own personal experiences for discussion and the pursuance of an active learning approach that is based on themes contextually relevant to their students. Providing a structured, focused learning environment runs parallel with this cohort’s desire to stimulate student interest and ownership of their learning environment.

### ***6.2.1.1 Children's Interests used as a Stimulus for Further Learning***

Asserting the importance of valuing their students' interests and using them as a stimulus for further learning is an approach advocated by half this cohort (5/10 Donna, Frances, Frank, Leona and Anna) Recognising that optimum participation and engagement is achieved when student interest is heightened, coupled with a willingness to diverge from planned activities is deemed by Donna, Frances and Anna as being essential to the success of their approach Donna and Frances state

I have my activities planned but I am a great believer in allowing spontaneous moments of happiness and learning to happen So you could walk in and we would all be sitting on the floor with a book that some child had become very interested in (Donna 30)

I tend to, if I am teaching a particular subject say or topic and some part of it really jumps out for them that I hadn't planned for, I will go with it If they are really attracted to something, or they feel that it is very relevant to them, or that it gets them talking, I can veer off slightly (Frances 111)

Anna believes that structured play is an invaluable methodology that helps to promote her students' educational and social development, while also having an evaluative function by providing her with an opportunity to "figure out how they are learning" (Anna 68) Using play time "to have a little chat with them" (Anna 69) about their interests feeds into her planning and preparation for future lessons



### ***6.2.1.2 Teachers - Sharing of the 'Personal'***

Encouraging students to make their own context the starting point for their learning experience is at the core of a Freirean approach to education. Giving students the freedom to share their thoughts and experiences is a key step towards creating a more open and inclusive dialogical culture. In order to lead by example and facilitate such 'sharing of the personal' in a safe and sensitive way, 2/10 (Claire and Grace) feel their willingness to open up their own personal lives for discussion demonstrates to students that 'sharing of the personal' is a valued and encouraged aspect of classroom life. Growing up in the respective local communities they now teach in, Claire, Grace and Moira feel that demonstrating interest in their students' lives outside of school is integral in helping them to build trust with students.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to their respective colleagues whom Moira (109) believes have little knowledge of the local community in which their students reside, this cohort believe that their familiarity with students' local communities enhances their capacity to 'connect' with them, a view articulated by Grace

I like the fact that they see, well she went to school just up the road. You know where they are talking about, where they are coming from, like their local teams. If you can say 'oh yea' and you know show an interest. (Grace 106 & 113)

In light of her personal knowledge of local secondary schools, Claire feels she connects with her students through the advice she offers those transitioning to post-primary level. This cohort's level of personal investment in the communities they serve, coupled with

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<sup>23</sup> While critical of her colleagues' lack of knowledge of the local community, Moira's account of her pedagogical approach does not reference a commitment to experiential learning.

their willingness to ‘open up their private world’ is an approach that Kozol (2007) believes is central to the creation of a culture of trust and openness

When somebody who’s not afraid to open up her private world a tiny bit, and doesn’t feel she has to tighten up her personality to gain respect, is given the reward of loyalty and trust by those whom *she* has trusted with the knowledge of the human being she really is (Kozol, 2007, p 31)

In contrast, a lack of empathy between teachers and young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds is one of the main reasons why the education system works to eliminate these young people from the system. These findings support Fagan’s (1995) assertion that teachers who are from a working class background are likely to empathise with students from similar backgrounds

#### ***6.2.1.3 A Contextually Based Approach to Mathematics***

Mathematics is identified by 4/10 (Marta, Barbara, Sarah and Anna) participants as a subject that lends itself to the use of an active learning approach based on contextually relevant themes. The positioning of mathematical problems in culturally specific contexts which are familiar and appealing to their students, is an approach advocated by Barbara and Marta. Adopting a “maths for life” (Barbara 224) approach by creating “real life” (Marta 83) scenarios in order to teach children about money is an approach favoured by Marta and Barbara, Barbara states “This is about ok if I go to the shop and I have a euro, I buy this and this and this. How much change am I expected to get back?” (Barbara 224). Encouraging their students to devise their own mathematical problems is another example of how Barbara and Anna encourage their students to

assume control of their own learning environment. The development of a deeper understanding of mathematics is another positive outcome of this process of “making maths exciting” (Barbara 30). Barbara states “I think that to become a good maths problem solver you have to be able to write a problem to be able to understand a problem” (Barbara 217). In line with best practice, this pedagogical approach to mathematics highlights this cohort’s commitment to making mathematics an enjoyable experience for their students through their engagement with problems that are relevant to their ‘real world’ lives.

#### ***6.2.1.4 A Flexible but Focused Approach***

Not wishing such a flexible, student driven approach to be confused with an ad hoc approach where students “are left off doing random things without any supervision” (Donna 209), is to the forefront of Donna, Claire and Conor’s considerations<sup>24</sup>. Their concern with providing a structured, focused learning environment runs parallel with their desire for students to assume ownership of their learning. Despite being advocates of experiential, contextually dependent learning, both Donna and Claire feel that this doesn’t prevent them from stressing the importance of a ‘focused’, objective driven pedagogical approach. Donna states

I think there is a role for it [objective driven approach] if you could combine the two [student driven and objective driven approaches]. I absolutely think there is a role for really focused, extremely well planned learning objective driven teaching. (Donna 84)

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<sup>24</sup> While Conor is an advocate of the importance of having explicit learning objectives, he does not reference a commitment to basing students’ learning on contextually relevant themes in his description of his pedagogical approach.

Claire expresses her reservations about an over reliance on active learning, an approach that she feels isn't necessarily the most effective in all circumstances "They need to get hands on and see things but I don't think for the sake of being active" (Claire 104) Considering an unplanned approach as an abdication of his responsibilities as an educator, Conor stresses the importance of the teacher establishing the context for children to engage in active learning "anything you are showing has to be given a kind of context, you cannot just throw on something there [points to the interactive whiteboard] and you know expect it to kind of teach them" (Conor 53) This cohort's misgivings about exclusive reliance on moments of 'spontaneity' to stimulate student engagement mirrors Shor and Freire's (1987) assertion that an ad hoc approach to the general organisation of learning leads to rudderless, incoherent debate, which they consider to be the antithesis of effective political advocacy which is defined by its clarity of aims

### ***6 2 2 Implementing a Holistic Approach to the Development of Students***

This section examines participants' commitment to providing their students with a wide variety of opportunities for learning through different mediums that respect and nourish the development of all forms of intelligence While only 3/18 participants express their commitment to full curriculum coverage across the eleven primary curriculum subjects, 12/18 interpret their commitment to a holistic approach in terms of their involvement in providing extra curricular activities in their respective schools The positive impact participation in such activities has on their students' development, particularly on those from marginalised communities, is identified by this cohort as

being central to their motivation. An exploration of the reasons given by participants to explain their inability to cover all curriculum subjects also forms a central concern of this section. Their schools' participation in DEIS literacy and numeracy initiatives, and the associated increase in instructional time allocated to the teaching of literacy and numeracy is cited by 5/18 participants as the primary reason for their lack of engagement with other curricular areas.

#### ***6.2.2.1 Creating Varied Learning Opportunities***

A commitment to ensuring that their students are giving full access to all curriculum subjects is stressed by 3/18 participants. Maximising opportunities for students to succeed in subjects that they find interesting is identified by Ciara, Sarah and Moira as forming a central tenet of their pedagogical approach. Sarah's following contribution encapsulates this shared consensus:

I think teachers you know should try and cover everything. I think also some of the teachers leave out PE [Physical Education], art and I think every child should get the experience of them because you always have the children that are going to be good at everything, then you have your lower achievers who maybe find that I am not doing so well in English, Irish and maths, but art could really be their thing, drama could be their thing, PE could be their thing. (Sarah 107 & 109)

The adverse effect teachers' failure to provide opportunities for students to experience 'success' is also highlighted by Sarah: "if they don't get to see that they are good at something their confidence goes way down, and it is horrible to see a child with no

confidence in their ability” (Sarah 109) Moira’s following contribution demonstrates her awareness of the need to make her students’ educational experience a more socially and culturally relevant one

Being happy is not feeling that they should be someone else but that they can come in here and be accepted for what they are and be offered stuff that they’re interested in Not stuff that’s irrelevant to them but stuff that they can enjoy (Moira 129)

This focus on increasing the relevancy of education for children, especially for students who are at risk of disengaging from formal education has the ultimate benefit of transforming their experience of education from one that marginalises and oppresses them, to one that they can enjoy and ultimately succeed in

#### ***6.2.2.2 Extra Curricular Activities – Increasing Students’ Motivation***

Although only 3/18 participants reference their commitment to ensuring full curriculum coverage, 12/18 (Fiona, Ciara, Linda, Barbara, Claire, Ryan, Grace, Frances, Frank, Conor, Sarah and Leona) interpret their commitment to a holistic pedagogical approach in terms of their involvement in providing extra curricular activities in their respective schools. A feature of the findings is the uneven distribution of participant involvement in the provision of extra curricular activities across the three school sites. While the majority of the Millplace (5/6) and Tupper (4/5) cohorts are involved in such provision, the proportion of the Limefield cohort (3/7) involved in extra curricular activities is somewhat lower.

Although it is unknown whether participants' involvement in the provision of extra curricular activities is remunerated, the range of personal and educational benefits that accrue for both teacher and students is cited by 6/12 (Ciara, Ryan, Barbara, Grace, Frances and Frank) of this cohort as a strong motivation behind their commitment to providing their students with extra curricular activities. While the enjoyment that the children derive from extra curricular activities is a strong motivational factor for Frances and Barbara to make such a commitment, this cohort also recognise the positive role extra curricular activities can play in helping to compensate for the alienating effect that the school curriculum can have on some working class students. Awareness that the curriculum reflects social and cultural relations which are different from and often antagonistic to those held by working class students (Lynch, 1999), is reflected in Ciara and Ryan's commitment to providing "the kids with opportunities that they wouldn't get otherwise so we have lots of after school activities" (Ryan 14), and attempting "to cater for every child and their needs in some way" (Ryan 15).

Poor attendance is a continual challenge for schools situated in marginalised communities and its strong correlation with early school leaving makes it a primary concern for many schools (Smyth & McCoy, 2009). Awareness of the need to increase their students' desire to attend school by providing opportunities for learning through different mediums that nourish the development of all forms of intelligence (Gardner 1983, 1999) is identified by 4/12 participants (Barbara, Grace, Frances and Frank) as their primary motivation in organising lunch time and after school extra curricular activities. Frank and Grace both highlight examples of students whose primary

motivation for coming to school is their participation in extra curricular activities Grace states

I am just thinking of one little boy in my class in particular and he would be a total candidate for never having homework done, and he arrives in at half nine and any sports clubs, games, whatever, he's here and he doesn't even realise that he is actually staying in school longer than he needs to (Grace 200 & 201)

The positive impact Barbara's school garden initiative had on a deeply disaffected boy in her class, clearly illustrates the importance Barbara attaches to providing opportunities for students to find their niche, Barbara states

There is a child in fifth class No interest in school, hopping off the walls most of time He started into the gardening club right Give him a spade he will dig for hours, he cannot spell anything, he can barely read He can name every single plant in the garden This boy brought them around the garden, talked them through every plant, was able to tell them everything about how he was actually looking after the plant (Barbara 61 & 62)

The upturn in confidence and self belief generated by this student's involvement with the gardening project is reflected in his new found ambition to now progress to third level, Barbara states "For him and his family third level education would be a non runner To finish second level education, to finish secondary school would be massive, and he said to his mam, 'mam they reckon I could go to college'" (Barbara 66 & 67)

The dual effect of increasing student motivation to actively engage with their learning, and strengthening the teacher-student relationship are other perceived benefits highlighted by Frances and Ciara Frances states "it's funny when you do sport with



them at lunch time or after school, they do actually work harder for you in a class. I think it is because you have a different relationship with them” (Frances 90)

Five of the participants involved in the provision of extra curricular activities held special duties posts (Fiona, Grace, Frances, Frank and Conor). These posts involved the organisation of sports, music and the arts in their respective schools. The professional autonomy and responsibility that comes with such leadership positions was positively received by this cohort. They spoke with enthusiasm about organising various whole school events and activities and the strong sense of collegiality and togetherness it engendered among the school community as a whole. As post holder for music, and chief organiser of Millplace’s annual musical, Grace’s account of the role her colleagues play in making the event such a success illustrates this point.

Yea, like I’m technically the head organiser because music is my post. But that said, everyone has been saying to me ‘well done, congrats it was brilliant’ and I’m trying to say, it was far from just me. Like every single teacher in the school helped. Like at one point the week before in the staffroom there was about three of us sitting having our lunch and we were saying where is everyone? They were all down with the kids practicing. (Grace 206 & 209)

The enthusiasm and commitment that the cohort as a whole have to ensuring their students are provided with opportunities to develop their talents outside the classroom environment dispels Troman’s (1996, 2008) assertion that the vocational dimension to teaching has been replaced with more cynical and calculative identities amongst the new

generation of teachers. Instead, this cohorts' level of involvement in voluntary work points to the passion and principled commitment of new teachers (Hargreaves, 2005)

### ***6.2.3 Developing Students' Critical Thinking Skills***

Encouraging students to engage with a 'problematisation' (Crotty, 2003, p. 155-6) process that presents the concrete, existential situation of their students as a set of problems, is another effective way in which educators can achieve similar levels of student interest. Although there is widespread agreement among the participants that the development of children's literacy and numeracy skills is essential, there is less discussion on the nature of these skills and the context in which they should be developed. This is reflected in the relatively low level of participant engagement with the theme with 7/18 participants (Donna, Moira, Linda, Barbara, Ryan, Leona and Conor) outlining the need for teachers to develop their students' 'thinking skills' through the implementation of a 'problematisation' process.

#### ***6.2.3.1 Empowering Students "to think for themselves"***

Empowering students "to think for themselves" (Moira 118) is the primary focus of Moira and Donna's commitment to a problem posing pedagogy. While Leona does not define what she means by focusing on "lessons of life" (Leona 93), both Moira and Donna are more explicit in conceptualising their praxis. According to Donna and Moira, the ability of students to make well considered personal decisions about their futures not only empowers them to take control of their own lives, but it also plays a key role in

helping students to visualise a route out of the cycle of poverty that many of them find themselves consumed by Donna states

What you can do is really reinforce those skills those decision making skills, those self confidence skills that enable them to make decisions about life, their own life The motivational skills, the meta cognitive like ok what is the best way to go about this? What is the best subject to pick? Those kind of reasoning and thinking skills, and those personal skills that tend to get most people through regardless of whether you are academic or not (Donna 136)

Moirra sees this as a pivotal factor in helping them to broaden their horizons and “break out of the cycle of just ‘oh me Ma and Da do this so I have to do it’” (Moirra 118) While placing an emphasis on developing students’ critical thinking skills is a key component of a liberating praxis, Moirra’s negative portrayal of her students’ parents could be viewed as contradictory to the ethos on which such a culture is built

#### ***6.2.3.2 Giving Students Space and Time to develop their own Opinions***

In order to develop critical thinking skills, 3/7 (Conor, Ryan and Leona) participants advocate the importance of teachers creating a dialogical classroom culture which affords students time and space to develop opinion and argument Resisting the temptation to provide ready made answers, an approach that Kozol (1968) refers to as teachers “looking for their own reflection” (p 149), which inevitably has the net effect of stifling and suppressing debate is a challenge that Conor, Ryan and Leona feel they need to address Conor states

I think the temptation is there to literally go this is the way it should be I think if they are able to question what you have presented to them and they are able to make it their own and draw their own conclusions from it I think it gives them more command over it, more control over it, it gives them more interest in it rather than if you are literally just presenting facts as gospel (Conor 77)

Ryan and Leona refer to becoming “less teacher driven” (Leona 84) with experience, as critical reflection has assisted them in realising the futility of “just stand[ing] up there and teach[ing] them because they won’t listen to me” (Leona 86), an approach that Ryan sartorially refers to as being “the sage on the stage” (Ryan 214) Strengthening his students’ self esteem and providing a forum for them to articulate their views in a truthful and honest manner, free from restraints or recriminations, is an environment that Frank and Anna wish to cultivate Frank states

You want them to be comfortable, you want them to be confident I feel successful when they are confident enough to stand up on their own two feet I wouldn’t want them afraid, afraid that they are going to be judged I want them to be honest honest about what they see (Frank 204)

However encouraging student opinion does not prevent Conor from intervening in a respectful manner if he feels the debate is misinformed by factual inaccuracies Conor states

I’d have no problem with them expressing an opinion on something, but if it’s something that I would see as being completely wrong, I would feel free in

that case to maybe point out some fact about it, or correct it in some regard  
(Conor 80)

Rather than suppressing debate, teachers can spark critical thinking amongst students by challenging student opinion and articulating a counter position in a respectful manner  
(Freire, 1992)

### ***6.2.3.3 The Role of Emotions in the Development of Decision Making Skills***

While the aforementioned process of ‘problematism’ is central to the development of critical thinking skills, there is a tendency to frame it exclusively within the parameters of a rationalist paradigm. A neglect of the significance of the level of emotional engagement required in decision making helps to facilitate the continued primacy given to the technical aspects of teaching. Creating opportunities for their students to explore their feelings, and develop appropriate emotional responses to different contextual stimuli, is a process that Linda and Barbara place considerable importance in. The development of anger management and conflict resolution strategies is promoted by Linda across a range of subjects, while Barbara concentrates on providing her students with opportunities to interact positively with each other through their participation in group project work and shared reading programmes. The importance of not confining the development of these essential decision making skills to weekly SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education) lessons is stressed by Donna, Linda and Barbara, with Donna stating “I am not over prioritising those life skills but they really are not a side thing for SPHE, they are not a circle time activity you know, they really need to be in every aspect” (Donna 143). Framing the development of

critical thinking within a rationalist paradigm, not only is a denial of the educational needs of both teachers and students as emotional beings (Baker et al , 2004, Freire, 1998), it also serves to inhibit children's development of political consciousness (Held, 2006, Tronto, 1993) Donna, Linda and Barbara's assertion of the importance of emotions in learning challenges this pedagogical reductionism

#### ***6.2.4 Summary of Findings in relation to 'Liberating Pedagogies'***

Findings in relation to 'liberating pedagogies' across the entire sample demonstrates a moderate degree of participant engagement with such pedagogies, with 10/18 of participants having 'good to strong' commitment to the three dimensions of liberating practice identified. There is an uneven distribution of commitment levels across the three dimensions of liberating pedagogies identified from the data. While 10/18 of the total sample expressed their commitment to 'Promoting experiential learning', a figure that is consistent with the overall mean across the three dimensions, there is a marked drop to 7/18 of the sample who reference the importance of 'Developing students' critical thinking skills'. Indeed the dimension that participants demonstrate the strongest level of commitment to 'Implementing a holistic approach to the development of students', with 12/18 of the entire cohort articulating its centrality to their pedagogical approach, is exclusively attributable to participants' commitment to providing extra curricular activities to their students rather than a pedagogical focus that is concerned with providing varied learning opportunities for students across the eleven curriculum subjects.

A comparative analysis of the proportions of teachers committing to the various aspects of liberating pedagogies across the three school sites is illustrated in Table 4. The analysis reveals minor differences in commitment levels across the three sites.

**Table 4: Participant Commitment to the Implementation of ‘Liberating Pedagogies’ across School Sites**

	<b>Strong Commitment</b>	<b>Good Commitment</b>	<b>Modest Commitment</b>	<b>No Evidence of Commitment</b>
<b>School</b>				
<b>Limefield (DEIS 1) (N=7)</b>	0/7	3/7	3/7	1/7
<b>Millplace (DEIS 1) (N=6)</b>	1/6	3/6	1/6	1/6
<b>Tupper (DEIS 2) (N=5)</b>	1/5	2/5	2/5	0/5

When the DEIS 1 and DEIS 2 cohorts’ (see Table 5) level of commitment to implementing ‘liberating pedagogies’ are compared, the findings show only minimal differences in commitment levels. However, a breakdown of the findings across the three dimensions of ‘liberating pedagogies’ (See Table 6) reveals some significant points of divergence. A clear example of this divergence is evident in the greater proportion of DEIS 2 (Tupper) participants (4/5) expressing ‘good to strong’ commitment to ‘Promoting experiential learning’ in comparison to the DEIS 1 cohort

(6/13). While less of a differential is observed in relation to commitment levels to ‘Implementing a holistic approach to the development of students’, a greater proportion of the DEIS 2 (Tupper) cohort (4/5) are identified as having ‘good to strong’ commitment to its implementation in comparison to the DEIS 1 cohort (9/13). A break in this pattern is observed in relation to the category with the lowest levels of participant commitment across the entire sample - ‘Developing students’ critical thinking skills’,<sup>25</sup> with a higher proportion of the DEIS 1 cohort (4/13) identified as having ‘good to strong’ commitment to this practice, in comparison to 1/5 of the DEIS 2 (Tupper) cohort.

**Table 5: Participant Commitment to the Implementation of ‘Liberating Pedagogies’ across DEIS Bands**

	<b>‘Good to Strong’ Commitment</b>	<b>‘No Evidence - Modest’ Commitment</b>
<b>DEIS 1 (N=13)</b>	7/13	6/13
<b>DEIS 2 (N=5)</b>	3/5	2/5

<sup>25</sup> Seven of the eighteen participants expressed commitment to ‘Developing students’ critical thinking skills’, making it the category with the lowest level of participant commitment across the six categories pertaining to their daily teaching practices.



**Table 6: Breakdown of Participant Commitment to the Dimensions of ‘Liberating Pedagogies’ across DEIS Bands**

	<b>DEIS 1 (N=13)</b>	<b>DEIS 2 (N=5)</b>
<b>1. Promoting experiential learning</b>	6/13	4/5
<b>2. Implementing a holistic approach to the development of students</b>	9/13	4/5
<b>3. Developing students’ critical thinking skills</b>	4/13	1/5

While differences between commitment levels in relation to participants’ level of teaching experience and professional development are minimal, social background was identified as a demographic variable worthy of further exploration. The greater proportion of the ‘middle class’ cohort (6/9) demonstrating ‘good to strong’ commitment to liberating pedagogies, in comparison to the ‘Working Class-Close Proximity’<sup>26</sup> cohort (4/9), draws attention to the influence participants’ social background appears to have on their pedagogical preferences. When the ‘Working Class-Close Proximity’ cohort is split into its two sub cohorts, 2/3 of the ‘Working Class’ sub-cohort was found to have ‘good to strong’ commitment to implementing

<sup>26</sup> The ‘Working Class-Close Proximity’ cohort includes participants that are categorised as working class and/or those that grew up in close proximity to the working class communities they now teach in.

‘liberating pedagogies’, a proportion which compares favourably with the 2/6 of the ‘Close Proximity’<sup>27</sup> sub-cohort who express a similar commitment

### **6.3 A Devolved, Power Sharing Approach to Classroom Management**

This next section looks at the issue of ‘power’ in the classroom, and how participants engage with a devolved power sharing approach to classroom management, an approach that encourages students to take ownership of their actions. Fifteen out of eighteen participants articulate classroom management styles that rely to a varying degree on the teacher adopting an authoritative disposition. While 4/18 of the entire cohort articulate an approach exclusively based on the principle of control, the majority of participants (11/18) articulate a classroom management style that seeks to achieve a balance between a devolved power sharing approach, and a more authoritarian, teacher driven approach. Significantly, no participant was categorised as displaying an exclusive commitment to a democratic approach. Sacrificing elements of their initial belief in a devolved power sharing culture in favour of maintaining tighter control of students, is a common theme running through 13/18 of the entire sample. A concern clearly articulated by this cohort and which helps explain the cohort’s reluctance to commit to a more egalitarian approach, is their expressed fear that they may lose control of their classroom if a power sharing arrangement is initiated.

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<sup>27</sup> The ‘Close Proximity’ sub-cohort is comprised of the six participants that grew up in middle class families in close proximity to the communities they now teach in.

### ***6.3.1 Democracy with Boundaries***

Eleven of the eighteen participants (Fiona, Donna, Ciara, Lmda, Barbara, Ryan, Frances, Frank, Conor, Leona and Anna) expressed a willingness to incorporate elements of a democratic approach into their classroom management style. Tolerance of 'classroom noise' is much referenced by participants when discussing their classroom management styles. In line with their commitment to a devolved, power sharing approach to classroom management, 3/11 of this cohort consider student talk to be indicative of an environment where true learning is taking place. Their ability to 'connect' with students is deemed by 7/11 participants to be instrumental in helping to foster such a collaborative learning culture. Helping students to develop conflict management strategies was another way in which participants (3/11) felt they were contributing to the creation of a positive classroom environment. Critically reflecting on their practice and the instrumental role it plays in preventing teachers from adopting an overly authoritarian disposition towards their students, is highlighted by 5/11 participants. Despite their commitment to a more democratic classroom management approach, they are reluctant to dispense with the more teacher driven approach in its entirety. The eleven participants who express a willingness to incorporate elements of a democratic approach into their classroom management also see the importance of preserving some boundaries between teacher and student.

### ***6.3.1.1 Creating a Co-operative, Respectful Learning Environment***

The importance of forming a positive, trusting relationship with students is seen by 7/11 participants (Donna, Linda, Ryan, Frank, Leona, Conor and Anna) as crucial in fostering a co-operative, respectful learning environment. Ryan states “if you can make that little bit of a connection they willingly do anything that you give them to do” (Ryan 63). The importance of building trust with students is also deemed by this cohort to be central to the development of a learning environment that is defined by its sense of cooperativeness and collegiality.

Teacher modelling of the skills required in order to encourage such positive interaction among their students is central to Donna, Linda and Anna’s inclusive approach. Donna states “I think when the children see you being positive towards other children and saying ‘oh I love how you have this today’ When you highlight their positive traits, the children will pick up on them” (Donna 211). Creating a classroom culture that is imbued with a sense of community is an expressed aim of Anna, one she believes can be achieved through demonstrating to her students the virtues of tolerance and understanding. Anna states

Your classroom is like a little community and I suppose you are trying to give them good values and you are trying to make them tolerant make sure that the children are helpful to one another as well as obviously teaching them their academic work (Anna 92)

Explicitly modelling the skills of negotiation and compromise lies at the heart of Linda’s approach in this area.

Well just teach them the skill    how to ignore bad behaviour You know that they're sharing, that it is fair Like lowering their voices, how you would communicate with the regular person on a day to day, negotiate with each other (Linda 118)

Presenting various scenarios to the children in story form is a methodology that Donna believes is an effective way of developing empathy amongst her pre-school students “they are great at being so sanctimonious about children that are being mean to other children in a story, but I think that's great because you get to feel how the little boy felt?” (Donna 214) Both Linda and Donna encourage their students to take ownership of their own actions Resisting the temptation to intervene and resolve a dispute, and trusting her students to use teacher modelled “negotiation and conflict resolution skills” (Donna 138) to solve the impasse, is a manifestation of this classroom policy of student empowerment Accepting that passivity is not a natural condition of childhood or adulthood (Shor & Freire, 1987), and seeing dialogue as a way of moving them towards an appreciation of each other's point of view lies at the heart of this methodological approach

#### ***6.3.1.2 Critical Reflection on the Destructive Influence of a Culture of Control***

The importance of reflecting critically on their practice, and the role it plays in preventing them from adopting an overly authoritarian disposition towards their students, is highlighted by 5/11 of this cohort Donna, Ciara, Barbara, Leona and Anna outline examples of times when they have critically reflected on their approach to classroom management and the detrimental impact an over zealous approach can have

for their students. The transition from reflection to action is demonstrated in Anna's awareness of the damaging effect 'shouting' can have on students, and the role it plays in encouraging her to take affirmative action. Anna stresses the importance of modelling conciliatory behaviour by apologising to her students when she loses her temper with them. Anna states

If I do shout at someone or lose my cool, I will come back to them later and I will say "do you understand why, and when I calm down I will say I'm sorry for losing my cool and that's not the way to behave" (Anna 125)

This process of critical reflection has the parallel effect of helping to erode the unequal power dynamic between teacher and student. By admitting their mistakes to students, and providing a rationale as to why they may have acted in an inappropriate or rash manner, this cohort of participants are acknowledging that our actions as teachers have consequences for the lives of others (Roberts, 2003, p. 171)

Such reflection is crucial in preventing participants from adopting an overly authoritarian disposition towards students, as articulated by Leona: "I think I am really relaxed and stuff. I would rarely shout now like, 'You know I am not perfect, I do shout but I wouldn't be shouting everyday, I make a point of that'" (Leona 45). Barbara feels that she has grown to appreciate the destructive influence an over emphasis on control can have on students' experiences of schooling.

You do get definitely more conscious. Like I have done this before. I would wake up in the morning in senior infants and say I am not going to mention bla, bla's name. 'Ok I am going to try my best today to do that' because you do get

conscious sometimes, am I actually picking, am I spotting everything that you do? (Barbara 171)

Their dislike of some of their colleagues labelling children as being 'bold' (Ciara and Donna), and their appreciation of the effect negative labeling can have on children (Ciara, Donna and Leona), is another example of this cohort's engagement with this reflective process

### ***6.3.1.3 Considering Student Talk to be a Positive Sign of Learning***

Many participants reference the issue of 'tolerance of classroom noise' when discussing their classroom management styles, and associate it with the use of more democratic, inclusive pedagogies. In line with their commitment to a devolved, power sharing approach to classroom management, 3/11 (Frances, Frank and Fiona) consider student participation in dialogue to be indicative of a true learning environment, with the following contribution from Frances reflecting this view "Yea I quite like talk, I prefer talk to be honest. If they were sitting there mute in front of me that would probably drive me mad" (Frances 116). Ensuring that student talk is focused on the task at hand is of paramount importance to Frances and Frank. Frances states "as long as they are interested you know. As long as they are talking on task about what you're doing. I think there is a lot of value in talk to be honest" (Frances 117). The need to show tolerance towards noise in light of the accrued benefits from student participation in a democratic, dialogical environment is stressed by Frank "If you are generating discussion the whole time and asking them for their opinion the whole time, you have to have tolerance for them talking out of turn and you have to have tolerance for noise in

the class” (Frank 43) A rise in classroom noise levels is considered by these participants to be a necessary inconvenience in light of the accrued educational benefits that a dialogical classroom culture generates

### ***6.3.2 The Need for Boundaries***

While an analysis of the practice of these 11 participants (Fiona, Donna, Ciara, Linda, Barbara, Ryan, Frances, Frank, Conor, Leona and Anna) demonstrates a level of commitment to the creation of a democratic classroom environment, there is also a parallel concern among this cohort that some boundaries between teacher and student still need to exist. The parallel concern with maintaining control, and the pervasiveness of its influence, is reflected in the proportion of participants (15/18) who express some level of reliance on an authoritative disposition.

While the majority of this cohort do not rely exclusively on such a *modus operandi*, 4/15 (Bernie, Grace, Claire, and Sarah) articulate an approach that is predominantly based on the principle of control. Establishing and maintaining clear boundaries between teacher and students forms a central tenet of this emphasis on control, an approach which is clearly explained by Grace: “There is a really clear line. They know that it is there and it’s not to be crossed” (Grace 145). While the firm approach to discipline enforcement that Grace describes is representative of these four participants’ classroom management philosophy, the 11/15 participants that articulate a belief in the value of both democratic and control ideologies are not reticent in articulating the authoritative dimension to their classroom management style, as reflected in the following



contributions from Linda and Leona. Both participants stress the importance of students not questioning their authority, with Linda particularly demonstrative in expressing her commitment to a 'teacher as enforcer' role. "They should know, I suppose putting it bluntly who is boss" (Leona 119). Linda's reference to "children need[ing] to remember that you're their teacher and that they respect that and that they don't question your authority" (Linda 179), clearly illuminates her conviction in relation to the legitimacy of her 'unquestioned' authority, and the subordinate role that students are expected to play in the classroom hierarchy. With such a premium being placed on the importance of maintaining control, there are undoubted ramifications for the power dynamic between teacher and students. Leona's rationale for her reliance on such an approach is insightful. "You still have to behave and stuff because that's preparing them for society. You know they are going to have to behave in certain ways for certain instances outside of school when they are older" (Leona 120). Leona's reference to behaving "in certain ways for certain instances" (Leona 120) appears to be consistent with a conservative vision of education that views it as preparation for a society that is static in nature and where power relations are depoliticised (Freire, 1996).

#### ***6.3.2.1 Sacrificing Democratic Beliefs in Favour of Tighter Control***

Fear that classroom control will be eroded if they rely exclusively on a democratic approach is a persistent concern cited by the 11/18 participants whose ideas about classroom management are influenced by both democratic and autocratic ideologies. Not wanting to be considered a soft touch by students, and in some cases by colleagues, is a recurring theme running through the contributions of this cohort. Barbara states

“Particularly if you do get into the active stuff, they do start hopping off the walls to bring it back is awful hard after that” (Barbara 248 & 250) In total 13/18 (Fiona, Bernie, Moira, Donna, Barbara, Claire, Ryan, Grace, Conor, Sarah, Leona, Frank and Anna) admit to sacrificing elements of their democratic beliefs in favour of tighter classroom control. Ryan’s following contribution is reflective of the general consensus among this group of participants

I think it is a heavy part of my teaching [open, democratic style], maybe too much so (Ryan 74) if that personal relationship is there, sometimes those lines can blur and when you find the kids crossing that line you have to ask yourself, well are they crossing the line because you have invited them across (Ryan 76)

Perceiving themselves to be “too liberal” (Donna 34) and “a bit idealistic” (Conor 81 & 83) in their approach, both Donna and Conor admit to having to “reign in” (Donna 34) their democratic approach in light of what they perceived to be the erosion of their authority that a democratic approach precipitated. Fiona’s desire to create a democratic environment in which students are considered part of a decision making process is tempered by pressure to conform to her school principal’s conservative educational vision. Both Claire and Donna adopt a pragmatic approach to student autonomy and choice, and persevere with such an approach as long as it is of educational benefit, with Donna stating “Is this [active learning] productive, socially, cognitively? If it’s not wrap it up” (Donna 35), while Claire feels “They need to get hands on and see things but I don’t think just for the sake of saying you have used active methods of learning is any good because a lot of the time it can turn into messing here in particular” (Claire

104) Claire's expressed fear that active learning will descend "into messing *here* in particular" (Claire 104) is indicative of the increasing concern among teachers about their capacity to maintain discipline, concerns that are felt particularly among those working in schools serving marginalised communities (EDC, 2004)

Feeling that their colleagues disapprove of their less structured pedagogical style has contributed to Ciara, Ryan, Conor and Anna tempering their approach to make it more compatible with the prevailing school culture. Conor states "I think there was nearly an attitude of C's [Conor's] room, 'oh that is chaos in there'" (Conor 81). Ryan, who perceived himself as "more lax than all the other teachers in the school" (Ryan 126), outlines how several of his colleagues disciplined his class "because they feel [felt] someone should be giving out to the class" (Ryan 130). Anxiousness to conform to a prevailing school culture that places a high value on strict discipline and highly structured pedagogies is reflected in Ciara's belief that she is "softer maybe than I should be" (Ciara 118), and Anna's feelings of frustration towards her class when they are talkative and inattentive. This internalisation of their perceived failure in relation to the maintenance of strict control appears to correlate with Sugrue's (1996) claim that the prevailing school culture encourages teachers to look within themselves for solutions rather than looking towards the role of the curriculum, school structures, or the quality of staff working relationships.

### ***6.3.3 Summary of Findings in relation to 'A Devolved, Power Sharing Approach to Classroom Management'***

The findings in relation to 'a devolved, power sharing approach to classroom management' demonstrated that across the entire sample there was a moderate degree of engagement with this approach, with 11/18 participants expressing some degree of commitment to such an approach. While there were only minor differences in commitment levels across the three school sites, there was some variation in commitment levels identified between the DEIS 1 and DEIS 2 cohorts. The findings show that a greater proportion of the DEIS 2 (Tupper) participants (4/5) expressed a commitment to incorporating elements of this democratic approach into their daily practice than the DEIS 1 cohort (7/13).

As one might anticipate having established themselves as teachers, a greater proportion of the more experienced participants were found to be more committed to a power sharing management approach than the less experienced cohort, with 5/6 of participants with '6-9 years' experience expressing their commitment to a democratic classroom management approach, a figure which compares favourably with the 6/12 of participants with '3-5 years' experience. These findings are consistent with recent Irish based research that points to a high degree of concern amongst NQTs in relation to managing classroom discipline (Inspectorate of DES, 2005a, Killeavy & Murphy, 2006), and thus making them more likely to be influenced by a school culture that values authoritative classroom management.

## 6.4 An Ethic of Care

A consistent feature of the majority of participants' (15/18) accounts of their daily practice is the primacy they afford to the care dimension of their professional role<sup>28</sup> While this commitment to their care role is a consistent feature across all three school sites, it is particularly strong in Limefield with (7/7) of its participants emphasising its importance<sup>29</sup> The various ways in which participants support their students and tend to their care needs are examined Being available to listen to student concerns (7/15), a willingness to impart advice (2/15), and ensuring their students feel secure and safe in school (8/15) are just some of the ways in which participants demonstrate their commitment to their care role While the cohort are strongly committed to providing care and support to their students, there is an absence of dialogue on the role they can play in the development of their students' emotional capacity to understand each other's viewpoints, a central feature of a dialogical classroom (Ellsworth, 1989)

### 6.4.1 *Being Available to Listen*

Being available to listen to their students concerns is referenced by 7/15 participants (Fiona, Bernie, Marta, Donna, Hannah, Sarah and Anna) as forming a key part of their professional role Fiona and Sarah are conscious of ensuring students are comfortable approaching them with their concerns

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<sup>28</sup> The following list of participants comprises the 15/18 participants that articulate their commitment to their care role Fiona, Bernie, Marta, Donna, Moira, Ciara, Lmda, Hannah, Barbara, Claire, Frances, Frank, Sarah, Leona and Anna

<sup>29</sup> All seven of Limefield's cohort stressed the importance of the care role in comparison to 4/5 of Tupper participants, and 4/6 of the Millplace cohort

I'm conscious of it, they need to be listened to I think for a lot of them they just need to be listened to (Fiona 52)

I think it is important for them to feel that they can come to you and tell you things that maybe they wouldn't want to tell anybody else so I think it is important that you do have that friendly aspect (Sarah 33)

Linda, Hannah and Anna assert the importance of being a reliable and consistent presence in their students' lives They believe that this is central to building up trust between teacher and student, with Linda stating "they know they can trust me, you know we are building this trust, you know we have worked on it all year long" (Linda 186)

Fiona, Bernie, Marta, Donna and Anna place a strong emphasis on creating informal opportunities for children to talk with them Scheduling specific times during the day for such interaction is a practice that Fiona and Bernie find effective, while circle time is identified by Bernie, Marta and Fiona as a mediating forum through which students can articulate their thoughts in a safe and secure environment

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#### ***6.4.2 Offering Advice and Support***

As well as being available to listen to students' concerns, Barbara and Claire cite their willingness to offer their students advice about their prospective post-primary education, as another manifestation of their care role Having attended schools in the local area, both feel they are well positioned as 'insiders' to be locally insightful and thus offer advice in this area Barbara, who comes from a middle class family but grew

up in close proximity to the area in which she now teaches, describes the efforts she went to ensure that one of her students was placed in the appropriate stream in post-primary school as an example of her ability to make a tangible difference in the lives in her students “That was making a difference to me, to actually say to him and he was like ‘Miss thanks for believing in me and that I could do it’” (Barbara 201) The belief and confidence Barbara has in her students’ capacity to succeed is also in evidence in Claire’s account of the advice she gave to her students in relation to their choice of post-primary school Coming from a working class background and having attended a local post-primary school, Claire feels her ‘insider’ knowledge places her in a position of authority to help her students make well informed choices about their transition to post-primary school

#### ***6.4.3 Creating a Happy, Safe and Predictable Environment for Students***

Wanting the classroom environment to be a “safe” (Frank 136, Donna 83, Barbara 222) and “secure” (Fiona 48, Anna 38) refuge for students from what they perceive to be the “unpredictable” (Frank 135) nature of some students’ home environment, is a key concern for 8/15 participants (Fiona, Ciara, Barbara, Frances, Frank, Leona, Sarah and Anna)<sup>30</sup> Frances’ belief that school “might be the only place where something nice might be said to them” (Frances 85) reflects the belief that a key component of this cohort’s professional role is to address the perceived absence of care and support in their students’ home lives Creating opportunities for their students to experience happiness in order to distract them from the sadness that permeates their lives outside the confines of

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<sup>30</sup> It is a concern that is considerably more pronounced among the Tupper cohort with 4/5 of its participants expressing their commitment to its pursuit in comparison to 2/7 and 2/6 of the Limefield and Millplace cohorts respectively

school, is another theme expanded upon by this cohort of participants, with Leona stating

they shouldn't be coming in here crying because they don't want to come in to this place (Leona 72) because there are some of those kids and they go home to horrible things, so that's what my classroom, that's what I want it to be ultimately (Leona 73)

Frank's vision embodies "distracting them from home from school from the mundane English, Irish, Maths" (Frank 128) by attempting to widen students' horizons, and provide them with opportunities that he is confident they won't have outside school "They need kind of some sort of a mini league in the classroom, they need a trip away that opportunity to bring them somewhere where they won't reach again" (Frank 128)

Expressing belief in their students' capabilities, coupled with encouraging and praising their students' efforts, are ways in which Frances, Ciara and Anna address students' self esteem issues, needs which they perceive arise from parent neglect, with Ciara stating "I think some of them especially here kind of need that extra bit of care, or if they don't get that kind of encouragement or nurturing at home, that they have someone who kind of believes in them" (Ciara 119) Becoming an advocate for children that don't have a voice is an aspect of her professional role that Anna speaks passionately about, a passion which is evident in her account of the close relationship she developed with a child whom she describes as having "very low self esteem and whose family are very disadvantaged and whose parents are separated" (Anna 38) Anna



attributes the success of her advocacy to the level of encouragement and support she gave her Anna states

My relationship with her was I think very strong I said to her ‘you can be anything you want to be’ and I took an interest in her daily news, or her activities, or how she’s getting on with her classmates, and I tried to stand up for her (Anna 38)

Teachers are charged with the ultimate responsibility of being in *‘loco parentis’* and in light of the reported parental incompetence and neglect, this part of their role appears to take on particular significance in the disadvantaged setting The “extra caring responsibility” (Barbara 09) they feel the setting imposes on them, orientates them towards a definition of their professional role that encompasses a “parental role as well as a teaching role” (Barbara 09)

These findings clearly show that participants provide a high degree of emotional support to their students, support that is deemed necessary in light of the widespread perception among participants that working class children are placed in a position of disadvantage due to their home circumstances Indicative of professionals that passionately care about their students’ welfare, the level of frustration expressed by these participants towards perceived parent incompetence and neglect is both understandable and commendable However, the findings also reveal a need to deconstruct the ‘paternalistic’ nature of their interventions Paternalism and its inherent ideological structure that positions working class students as grateful ‘welfare recipients’, and their parents “as the pathology of the healthy society” (Freire, 1996, p

55) is highly problematic in terms of its propensity to reinforce working class dependency upon, and subservience to, middle class 'generosity'

### **6.5 Working with and Valuing of Diversity**

In relation to the question of student 'diversity', results of an analysis of participants' practice indicates that 18/18 participants detail practices that indicate some level of preference to assimilate minority ethnic students into the prevailing cultural norms of the school. While 8/18 of participants reference their support of, or engagement with, the celebration of difference and diversity, this is largely of an isolated, confined nature and does not preclude practices that are also indicative of a culture of assimilation. Only 2/8 participants (Donna and Moira) explicitly engage with the issue on a consistent basis. This level of discomfort with ethnic diversity is also reflected in the absence of discussion on their role in highlighting issues of inequality and social justice, with only Donna and Moira articulating practices that encourage discussion on these issues. While the strength of belief in the merits of assimilation varies across the sample, what all these contributions have in common is their shared desire to strike a balance between acknowledging ethnic diversity, and pursuing a policy of cultural assimilation.

### ***6.5.1 A Culture of Assimilation***

While the reluctance of the majority of participants to engage on more than a superficial level with the theme of ethnic diversity will be discussed in the following chapter, there is an initial focus on the 8/18 participants that reference varying levels of engagement with the ‘diversity’ question, and how the largely isolated nature of this engagement hints at their discomfort with the topic

#### ***6.5.1.1 Isolated, Confined Instances of Celebration and its Links to Assimilation***

Acknowledging difference exclusively through the celebration of the “the small things” (Sarah 61), such as special cultural events or reference points, is an approach pursued by 8/18 participants (Fiona, Ciara, Frances, Frank, Conor, Leona, Sarah and Anna), with Ciara and Sarah outlining their efforts in this respect

I would generally [celebrate] if there was something like that, like Halloween or you know Easter, or you know at Christmas, different ways to celebrate and I would try and bring it in that way (Ciara 210)

This year I have a boy and he is from China and we obviously celebrated the Chinese New Year and small things like that (Sarah 60)

It is significant that 5/8 of this cohort are Tupper participants (N=5), a finding that can at least partially be attributed to their positive disposition towards the school’s annual ‘intercultural’ day. What all these contributions have in common is the isolated, confined nature of these activities that shy away from authentically connecting with the social and cultural realities of many of their students

#### ***6.5.1.2 Striking a Balance between Acknowledging Diversity and Pursuing a Policy of Assimilation***

Unsurprisingly, in light of such a conservative, non interventionist approach to student diversity, this cohort of eight participants express a preference to assimilate their students into the prevailing cultural norms of the school. While the strength of belief in assimilation varies among the cohort, what all these contributions have in common is their shared desire to strike a balance between acknowledging cultural and ethnic diversity, and pursuing a policy of assimilation. Frances and Leona take the middle ground, with Frances stating “I suppose it is trying to keep a balance between obviously there are differences in maybe customs or you know background, but at the same time we are all part of the same community” (Frances 199). Despite talking about using students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds as invaluable sources of information and expertise in matters pertaining to their parents’ native countries, Frank is most demonstrative in articulating his commitment to assimilation “I treat them kind of as children from Tupper. I don’t treat them as children whose father is from Riga or Vilnius. This is their town, this is their county, this is where they are now” (Frank 194 & 195). Anna’s preference for assimilation is in evidence in her attitude towards minority language children speaking their native language in school. She documents an incident when she admonished two Polish students for speaking their native language in school. Although clearly motivated by her desire to ensure the students’ standard of English improves, her failure to recognise the importance of her students’ cultural and linguistic heritage is reflected in her dismay at the students’ negative reaction to her admonishment. Marta views the debate from an alternative

perspective by considering treating all children the same as being the epitome of equality. She references an experience of a parent wanting her child to be seated away from “the brown children” (Marta 254) as evidence of the need to be committed in her approach, and not bend to parental pressure. In her eyes, treating them as different would be an inappropriate and discriminatory approach to adopt.

### ***6.5.2 Authentic Celebration of Difference***

Moving from a simple acknowledgement of student diversity to embracing a culture of celebrating diversity is a process that 4/18 participants (Fiona, Sarah, Donna and Moira) have engaged with to varying degrees. While the literature outlines some of the limitations of a celebratory approach to interculturalism in terms of furthering the hierarchical position between the advantaged and the culturally dominant group (Bryan, 2008, 2009), it should be acknowledged that this cohort’s approach to intercultural education was in line with best practice (NCCA, 2005b). Significantly 3/4 (Fiona, Donna and Moira) of this cohort have completed, or were in the process of completing postgraduate degrees, with their contributions reflective of their engagement with such a critically reflective process that postgraduate studies help promote. Their positive attitude is reflected in Donna and Fiona’s referencing of student diversity as a “really welcome thing” (Fiona 143) and something “to be capitalised on” (Donna 311). Identifying exposure to different cultural traditions as a positive learning experience for both teacher and student is a point emphasised by both participants, with Donna viewing it as “a privilege to get to have experience of people from all over the world – it is a learning experience like right in front of you” (Donna 296). Fiona concurs with this

positive perception of intercultural diversity and feels that it brings richness to her classroom which she encourages her students to explore “it brings something new it brings different family dynamics Different families, different cultures have different beliefs about things and you get all of that in your class” (Fiona 146)

Two of the four participants (Donna and Moira) adopt an open, explicit approach to celebrating student diversity Displaying no hesitation in referring to students’ skin colour is a clear example of the transparency of Donna’s approach that seeks to remove the taboo that surrounds the issue of diversity in relation to skin colour “you know we painted the children’s faces and made no apologies for saying ‘what colour is your skin’?” (Donna 311) “You know, you’re brown, you’re black, you’re white, they call me pink sometimes” (Donna 312) According to Moira overcoming the temptation to ignore diversity (Moira 172 “one of the biggest things about diversity is that first I was tempted to ignore it and be like ‘oh everyone is the same’ and say I don’t see colour”) and consequently acknowledging the presence of diversity, is one of the first steps towards developing a liberating pedagogy This denial of diversity due to teachers’ level of discomfort with the issue deprives children from diverse backgrounds of their cultural and ethnic identity While Donna and Moira demonstrate a willingness to not only acknowledge but also celebrate diversity, there is an aspect to their approach which is problematic Differentiating on the basis of skin colour, rather than acknowledging the diversity of individuals in terms of bodies is a weakness in their approach Notwithstanding this, the metamorphosis in Moira’s approach, something she attributes partially to her greater experience, is based upon an acknowledgement that each child is

different and unique, uniqueness she now attributes to the richness of their social, cultural and ethnic heritage. Moira states “After working here, that was at the start, I used to have that difficulty. Now I kind of think of it as, every kid is different and it is because of the diversity” (Moira 176). Encouraging debate and discussion on social justice issues is in synch with this culture of openness and transparency, as she believes that no issue in school “should be a no go area. I think everything is open for discussion because I think they’ll figure it out when they are older and when they figure it out when they are on their own, they will have no one to discuss it with” (Moira 137 & 138). Crucially she sees these discussions on the aforementioned histories of oppression as being not only an opportunity to “learn about it [history of oppression] and talk about it” (Moira 137), but also as a way of encouraging students to problematise their own historical and cultural reality and “see what can be done about it” (Moira 137).

## **6.6 Conclusion**

This chapter reported on participants’ understandings of ‘making a difference’ and the shape it takes in their day-to-day practice as teachers in designated disadvantaged schools. Employing a critical socio-cultural perspective to the analysis of these understandings, participants’ expressed commitment to a praxis that asserts the importance of developing the dialectical relationship between children and their concrete historical and cultural reality (Freire, 1996) was deemed to be of critical interest. The findings in relation to liberating pedagogies reveal a high degree of support

and care for students but not enough connectedness to their students' world, or to a commitment to a democratic classroom management approach, or engagement with and a valuing of diversity

In relation to participants' commitment to 'liberating pedagogies' that are defined by their level of intellectual quality and connectedness, the findings across the entire sample demonstrate a moderate degree of participant engagement with such pedagogies, with 10/18 participants identified as having 'good to strong' commitment to their implementation. An analysis of the dimensions of 'liberating pedagogies' reveals an uneven distribution of commitment levels across the three dimensions. While the theme with the greatest level of participant engagement (12/18) was 'Implementing a holistic approach to the development of students', a moderate proportion of participants expressed their commitment to 'Promoting experiential learning' (10/18), and finally, a relatively modest proportion of the entire cohort expressed their commitment to 'Developing students' critical thinking skills' (7/18). While the DEIS 2 cohort was found to be marginally more committed to the implementation of 'liberating pedagogies' than the DEIS 1 sample, a breakdown of the findings across the three dimensions of 'liberating pedagogies' reveals some notable points of divergence, the most significant of which is the considerably greater proportion of DEIS 2 (Tupper) participants (4/5) expressing 'good to strong' commitment to 'Promoting experiential learning', in comparison to the 6/13 of the DEIS 1 cohort. Social background was also identified as having a significant influence on the level of participant engagement with 'liberating pedagogies'. A greater proportion of the 'middle class' cohort (6/9)



demonstrated 'good to strong' commitment to 'liberating pedagogies', in comparison to the 'Working Class-Close Proximity' cohort (4/9). This draws attention to the influence participants' social background appears to have on their pedagogical preferences. This is worth further exploration.

In line with the findings in relation to 'liberating pedagogies', there was a moderate degree of engagement with 'A devolved, power sharing approach to classroom management' with 11/18 of participants expressing some degree of commitment to such an approach. While this cohort demonstrates a level of commitment to the creation of a democratic classroom environment, there is also a co-existing concern among this cohort that some boundaries between teacher and student still need to be maintained. The parallel concern with maintaining control and the pervasiveness of its influence is reflected in the high proportion of participants (15/18) who express some level of reliance on an authoritative disposition, with 4/18 articulating an approach that is exclusively based on the principle of control. In line with the findings in relation to 'liberating pedagogies', the DEIS 2 cohort display a heightened commitment to incorporating elements of the democratic approach into their daily practice in comparison to their DEIS 1 counterparts. The more experienced cohort of participants were also found to demonstrate a greater level of commitment to a power sharing approach to classroom management than their less experienced colleagues, reflecting their greater capacity to resist the influence of institutionally embedded discourses of control.

A consistent feature of the majority of participants' (15/18) accounts of their daily practice is the primacy they afford to the care dimension of their professional role. The passionate commitment that participants exhibit in relation to meeting their students' care needs is a significant feature of the understandings of 'making a difference'. However, there is also a need to examine the sense of paternalism that imbues some participants' motivation to intervene on behalf of their students. Their accounts are also notable for an absence of dialogue on the role they as educators can play in the development of their students' emotional capacity to understand each other's viewpoints, a central feature of a dialogical classroom (Ellsworth, 1989).

Finally, the chapter concluded with an exploration of participants' engagement with the theme of diversity. The widespread preference to assimilate students into the prevailing cultural norms of the school, combined with the almost total absence of the 'working with and valuing of diversity' dimension in many participants' accounts of their daily practices is indicative of the 'sameness' that characterises their pedagogical approach.

In conclusion, an underlying assumption on which this study is based was that pedagogies that make implicit cultural assumptions instantiate an approach that largely ignores students' social and cultural reality, and treats all students as the same. This most benefits those with the requisite cultural capital that is bestowed upon them by their socialisation within the home and acts to further disadvantage the already disadvantaged in terms of such capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The modest level

of engagement with 'liberating pedagogies', and a democratic classroom management approach, coupled with the widespread preference to assimilate rather than work with and value diversity, are findings that conclusively point to the dominance of 'pedagogies of the same' that treat students in the same way, and a subsequent denial of identity constructions of difference (Lingard & Keddie, 2013)

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Ideology, Practice and the Influence of the ‘New Alliance’**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

While the previous chapter focused on participants’ daily practice in order to contextualise what ‘making a difference’ means for early career teachers working in designated disadvantaged schools, this chapter examines the underlying ideologies that are influencing this practice. In line with Apple’s (1982a) deconstruction of the workings of ideology, this chapter emphasises the importance of understanding the influence of ideology on “the concrete day to day curricular and pedagogic life” (p 249). While participants’ strong commitment to their caring role should indeed be praised, such articulations of care while necessary is however not sufficient to maximise pedagogical effects (Lingard & Keddie, 2013). Indeed, with participants demonstrating only moderate levels of commitment to liberating pedagogies, and a propensity to seek to control students and treat them in the same way, these findings carry significant social justice implications.

This chapter looks at a particular confluence of ideological influences and how they perpetuate pedagogical conservatism. In particular, the chapter articulates the influence of the globalisation movement on educational policy, pedagogies and politics through the teachers’ narratives. According to Singh et al (2005), a ‘New Alliance’ linking diverse agendas, namely ‘conservative modernization’, ‘neoliberal post-modernization’, and ‘instrumental technocracy’ with ‘authoritarian populism’ has emerged from this

globalisation project. They suggest that this odd mismatch of seemingly contradictory ideas have had a significant influence on the policies, pedagogies, and politics of education. While the 'New Alliance' appears to be a contradictory amalgam of ideological commitments, crucially its educational objectives have a unifying purpose, namely the expansion of the unfettered market. The influence this ideological amalgam is exerting on participants' praxis, their interaction with the respective institutional cultures, and ultimately on their perception of 'making a difference' is of primary concern in this chapter.

A central concern of this chapter is to compare practices across the three school sites. The interaction between the named ideological influences and the cultural forces at play in the three schools is of particular interest here. The chapter is in five parts and begins with a focus on the influence of 'implicit cultural assumptions' on participants' perceptions of 'ability and intelligence', and the effects that expressed essentialist beliefs have on lowering teacher expectations, and consequently imposing defined limits on what they perceive students can achieve. Part two looks at the reasons behind the strong investment in an 'ideology of control' in the two DEIS 1 schools. The propensity for a control ideology to not only reinforce limiting cultural assumptions but also fortify commitment to 'pedagogies of the same' (Lingard & Keddie, 2013) is examined closely, as are the factors that help some participants to resist its conservative influence. In part three, globalised educational policy discourses around the role high stakes testing can play in 'driving up' educational standards, and the influence they are exerting on participants' pedagogy and curriculum coverage (Stobart, 2008) is reflected upon. While

the aforementioned global and national policy trends are significant influencing factors, the findings also highlight the role institutional factors play in the internalisation of such ideologies. Part four explores the factors contributing to participants' lack of engagement with the theme of 'diversity', an aspect of participants' practice that crystallises the influence of the policy, professional and institutional terrain on reinforcing a culture of consensus around 'pedagogies of the same'. Finally, the chapter concludes with an exploration of participants' ethic of care that affirms not only the importance of providing social support to students, but also recognises the associated emotional engagement required to raise students' consciousness of social justice. Again, institutional influences are found to be central in reinforcing the importance of an ethic of care amongst participants, a prioritisation that occurs often at the expense of the implementation of intellectually demanding pedagogies. Throughout the chapter examples of participants' resistance to the constraining influence of these aforementioned ideologies are highlighted, and in the process exciting possibilities for teachers to articulate a vision of 'making a difference' that has a social justice focus, are identified.

## **7.2 Views on Ability and Intelligence**

The need to challenge the influence of ethnocentrism that Derman-Sparks (2002) claims "may cause us to experience our own cultural rules and values as the best or only way to be" (p. 67) is amplified considering the shared acceptance among 8/18 of participants (Linda, Hannah, Barbara, Claire, Grace, Conor, Sarah and Anna) that there

are certain limits to what their students can achieve academically. Such essentialist thinking construes intelligence to be primarily unitary, heritable, correlating with IQ, and quite predicative of school performance. This ‘fixed ability thesis’ with its focus on the divergence between students’ academic performances and capabilities, channels the debate towards a focus on educational differences in achievement. These differences are frequently ‘misrecognised’ as resulting from ‘individual giftedness’ rather than from class-based differences (Mills, 2008), thus ignoring the fact that the abilities measured by scholastic criteria often stem not from natural ‘gifts’ but from “the greater or lesser affinity between class cultural habits and the demands of the educational system or the criteria which define success within it” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p 22). Lowered teacher expectations of students, and the resultant ‘normalisation’ of low student attainment in designated disadvantaged schools (Dunne & Gazeley, 2008) are two of the negative teacher effects that can be attributed to the entrenchment of these implicit cultural assumptions. Only 2/18 participants (Ciara and Barbara)<sup>31</sup> challenge this essentialist thinking, and in the process highlight the transformative impact teachers can have on student motivation by communicating positive expectations to their students.

### ***7.2.1 Belief in Fixed Ability***

The contributions of 8/18 participants (Linda, Hannah, Barbara, Claire, Grace, Sarah, Conor and Anna) indicate varying levels of commitment to essentialist thinking. While 3/8 (Hannah, Grace and Linda) are more demonstrative and assertive in their commitment to such an ideology, 5/8 (Sarah, Barbara, Linda, Conor and Anna) display a

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<sup>31</sup> Contradictions and inconsistencies are a feature of Barbara’s contribution, as she expresses both compliance with, and resistance to the fixed ability thesis.

subtler, less conspicuous compliance Essentialism appears to have a particularly consuming influence amongst the Tupper and Millplace cohorts, with 4/6 and 3/5 of the respective cohorts expressing their belief in 'fixed ability', figures which stand in marked contrast to a mere 1/7 of the Limefield cohort who articulate similar beliefs (See Table 7) Participants' personal narratives are also identified as playing a role in determining the level of participant commitment to essentialism and meritocratic individualism, with an exploration of the 'Working Class-Close Proximity' cohort's 'stories' revealing their strong belief in individual responsibility and its role in determining educational success or failure

#### ***7.2.1.1 Fixed Ability Thesis and its Role in Reducing 'Performativity' Pressure***

The section commences with an exploration into the strong relationship between some participants' belief in a fixed ability thesis and the relatively lower levels of 'performativity' pressure they experience (See Table 7) The strength of this relationship is considered to be a manifestation of a culture of shared acceptance of the limits the 'disadvantaged' setting imposes on their capacity to 'make a difference' This belief system is particularly pronounced amongst the Tupper and Millplace cohorts Believing that there are inherent limitations to what working class students can achieve academically appears to have a dissipating effect on levels of pressure associated with the formal testing process, with only 2/8 of the participants (Hannah and Anna) that express essentialist beliefs referencing pressure associated with the formal testing process This relationship between commitment to essentialist beliefs and teachers' reported performance pressure is also reflected in the results of a comparative analysis



conducted across the three school sites. While commitment to fixed ability thinking is most prevalent amongst the Tupper (3/5) and Millplace (4/6) cohorts, a relatively low proportion of these school cohorts (Tupper: 2/5, Millplace: 2/6) report experiencing pressure arising from engagement with the standardised testing process. In contrast, the findings in relation to the Limefield cohort illuminates the strong relationship between the low proportion of its participants expressing their belief in fixed ability (1/7) and the relatively high proportion of its participants (4/7) who reference feeling under pressure to produce positive test results.

**Table 7: Relationship between Fixed Ability Beliefs and Pressure re Testing**

School	Participants Expressing 'Belief in Fixed Ability'	Participants Feeling Pressure re. Testing
Limefield	1/7	4/7
Millplace	4/6	2/6
Tupper	3/5	2/5

### *7.2.1.2 Legitimising Teachers' Position as Arbiters of Intellectual Capacity*

A shared acceptance of the limits that the social setting imposes on working class students is a recurring feature of the Tupper and Millplace cohorts' contributions. The cultural forces at play that help to buttress the influence of deficit models of understanding among participants in their respective schools are indicative of the effect of the 'circles of certainty' that Freire (1996) believes reinforces an ontological belief in educators' role in creating 'truth', and the legitimisation of their position as arbiters of their students' intellectual capacity.

The Millplace cohort's shared acceptance of what they perceive to be their student's fixed ability permeates Hannah and Grace's contributions. Ensuring that their students' are set academic work at an appropriate level to their ability is considered central to securing their students' happiness, with Hannah stating the importance of assigning "work at their level [so] that they feel that they can achieve something, I think that sends the children home happy" (Hannah 80). While such astute awareness of the importance of differentiation is highly commendable, their references to the academic capabilities of students and its relation to views on IQ points to the influence of essentialist beliefs. Questioning the quality of some of her students' "grey matter" (Hannah 85) and "gene pool" (Hannah 87), coupled with the emphasis she places on results in intelligence tests indicates the strong influence of essentialism on Hannah's thinking. Hannah states "the gene pool might not be the best and you look at the NRIT [Non Reading Intelligence Test] scores and you compare them" (Hannah 87). This coupled with Grace's reference to there being "an issue with IQ" (Grace 259) highlights their belief in the concept of

fixed ability. While Hannah and Grace's contributions reflect the pervasiveness of fixed ability thinking among the Millplace cohort, Hannah and Grace's shared social background is also worthy of further exploration. The fact that both Hannah and Grace are middle class but grew up close proximity to the designated disadvantaged schools they now work in is significant as it is consistent with a trend that is observed in relation to the relatively high proportion of the 'Close Proximity' cohort (4/6) that articulate their commitment to essentialist beliefs<sup>32</sup>

Pressure to ensure their students attain high scores in standardised tests is removed by virtue of the context they work in, with Grace perceiving her role as being "far from getting like a hundred percentile in Sigmas and Micras [Standardised Tests]" (Grace 236). Their appreciation of the futility of getting frustrated or "not putting too much on yourself" (Grace 251) as a consequence of their students' lack of academic progress, coupled with the realisation that "you can only work with so much" (Grace 251) and the futility of getting "stressed over it [absence of 'grey matter']" (Hannah 85), reflects this shared acceptance of 'an achievement ceiling' that attendance at a 'DEIS' school creates (Boaler, 2000, Hoadley & Ensor, 2009, Lynch & Lodge, 2002, Lyons et al, 2003). This normalisation of low student attainment appears to be consolidated by the presence of a leadership style that is accepting of such attainment patterns. Providing teachers with the space and freedom to pursue new initiatives are highly influential factors in creating a school culture that stimulates innovation and change but conversely an absence of urgency to effect change from school leaders can lead to stagnation and acceptance of

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<sup>32</sup> For more discussion on the relationship between participants' social class/background and commitment to meritocratic individualism and essentialism see Section 7.2.1.3

the prevailing status quo among the teaching staff. While the pressure free environment espoused by their principal was cited by 3/6 Millplace participants (Hannah, Claire and Grace) as being an important contributory factor in their continued commitment to the school, the impact that such 'a pressure free' environment in relation to academic attainment has on teacher expectations is apparent.

Pessimism about their ability to challenge the reproduction of social inequality is reflected in Conor and Sarah's acceptance that their expectations of students should be always tempered by the limitations that society, and more specifically the 'disadvantaged' setting imposes on them, a viewpoint that appears to resonate strongly with the Tupper cohort. Conor's acceptance that there will always be class differences in relation to students' academic performance reflects the pervasiveness of this pessimism. Conor states "I think in terms of actual differences, like between classes or between pupils with different backgrounds, I think it's something that you just have to get on with" (Conor 107). Conor's consciousness of the influence social class exerts on students' experiences of education is the exception relative to the lack of engagement with the topic across the whole sample. Sarah's account articulates her sense of frustration in relation to what she perceives to be some of her students' inability to make academic progress "there are the children who are never really going to pick up everything that you are saying but you have to try as hard as you can to instill something into them" (Sarah 96). Her reference to "have[ing] to realise the context that we are working in too" (Sarah 128) when assessing her students' academic performance similarly reflects a process of boundary setting in relation to what they as educators

should be reasonably expected to accomplish Anna's description of 'disadvantaged' children as "the children that go to learning support more often than not" (Anna 106) further reflects the influence the schools' social setting has on teachers' perception of what they feel they can achieve. This self-imposed achievement ceiling in relation to what they as educators can achieve, and the consequences this has for their students is consistent with the influence of liberal egalitarianism that perceives inequality to be a given, and that the best society can do is try to ameliorate some of the worst effects of its existence rather than seeking to eliminate it (Baker et al, 2004). The associated impact these circles of certainty have, not only on legitimising their ascribed roles as intellectual arbiters, but also on the level of intellectual demand they feel their students' are capable of has significant implications for students access to socially just pedagogies (Lingard & Keddie, 2013).

#### ***7.2.1.3 'Working Class-Close Proximity' Cohort's Commitment to Meritocratic Individualism***

Relative to the 'Middle Class' cohort (3/9), a higher proportion of the 'Working Class-Close Proximity' cohort (5/9 Hannah, Barbara, Claire, Grace and Anna) express a belief in a fixed ability thesis. When the 'Close Proximity' constituent is isolated from the 'Working Class-Close Proximity' cohort, 4/6 of this sub-cohort (Hannah, Barbara, Grace and Anna) are found to hold essentialist beliefs. However, these beliefs do not curtail the desire of the 'Working Class-Close Proximity' cohort as a whole to see their students succeed in school. On the contrary, a willingness to present themselves as positive role models for their students to emulate is accentuated among participants that

grew up in or in close proximity to the urban working class areas they now teach in  
Moirra's states

Just to try and show them that through education and through story and through  
tours, and set an example that I just came from a normal place like them, and that  
I could decide that I wanted to be a teacher, and that I went to college after  
school (Moirra 123)

While participants should be commended for having positive expectations for their  
students, there is a certain element of naivety present in Ryan's desire to "give the kids  
real aspiration and hope that they mightn't necessarily have" (Ryan 122), and Grace's  
wish "to get them into that frame of mind that they can do it [succeed]" (Grace 239)  
Similarly Moirra's belief "that they just don't know these basic things that you go to  
college after school" (Moirra 123) and the role she can play in "opening their mind away  
from this Because there is a kind of way of living in areas like this, that is a very set,  
rigid way and sometimes they don't know the possibilities that are out there" (Moirra  
124), also reflects a somewhat simplistic appraisal of the role she can play in addressing  
her students' social capital deficit The uncritical nature of these observations not only  
reflect an absence of recognition of the hegemonic influence on education, they are also  
indicative of the influence of liberal individualism, an ideology which diverts attention  
away from its role in reproducing social inequality by making individual responsibility  
the primary determinant of educational success or failure

This cohort's complicity with or 'adhesion' to a meritocratic system that is designed  
to ensure the failure of considerable swathes of society, but from which they have

derived success, appears to mirror in some regards Freire's (1996) account of the dispossessed classes of Latin America and their "adhesion" (p 27) to the oppressor which prevented the dispossessed from considering themselves as oppressed due to their submersion in the reality of oppression. The 'Working Class-Close Proximity' cohort's expressed commitment to meritocratic individualism (and the 'Close Proximity' cohort's heightened investment in a theory of fixed ability) implies a belief that failure or success at school is a function of what the individual is or does (Drudy & Lynch, 1993). Through the representation of the individual in abstract terms, rather than as a structurally located relational being, liberal individualism encourages one to look for educational solutions through changing individuals rather than challenging inequalities that are rooted in the social structures of society (Drudy & Lynch, 1993).

#### ***7.2.1.4 The Role of Habitus in Resisting the 'Circle of Certainty'***

While these findings clearly demonstrate the pervasiveness of the influence of essentialism on some participants' understandings of the difference they can make, there are pockets of resistance to its influence. Both Barbara and Ciara's resistance to the influence of the aforementioned 'circle of certainty' is based on transformative possibilities that the fluid and dynamic nature of teachers' narratives can facilitate (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). The capacity of habitus to resist the forces of the field (i.e. their schools' cultural forces that help to consolidate the deficit model) illuminates the transformative potential of this malleable vision of the educational field. Both Barbara and Claire use negative personal experiences of former teachers' low expectations of them to motivate them in resisting the 'acceptance' culture of their

respective schools. Coming from different social classes, Barbara and Claire's shared resistance to the deficit model of class highlights the potential of habitus to uncover the beliefs, relationships, and values that interact and combine to create early career teachers' personal and professional identities. Crucially, this exploration also allows one to examine both the limiting and liberating potential of habitus, which according to Harker and May (1993) allows one to account for agency in a world fettered by constraints, and how the complex amalgam of the past and present (Mills, 2008) contrives to make the habitus an arena available to be contested.

Barbara's contribution and the inherent contradictions and inconsistencies that are a feature of her narrative reflect the 'messiness' that defines this contestation. Barbara's personal childhood experience of the negative impact teachers' 'implicit cultural assumptions' concerning student ability and intelligence has on students, coupled with her expressed resistance to what she acknowledges is an embedded feature of her own school's culture, reflects the capacity of teachers' middle class habitus to incorporate a vision of social justice into the 'new stories' that they live by (Galman, 2009). This transformative quality is reflected in Barbara's criticism of the practice of 'dumbing down lessons' in DEIS schools. Her anxiousness to retain high expectations for her students and not to become influenced by a culture of acceptance that is particularly embedded in Millplace, reflects her capability to resist the 'gradual process of inculcation' involved in the 'unconscious' reproduction of class habitus (Apple, 2004). Consequently, this resistance challenges the perception that habitus is a concept that is deterministic and consequently limiting. Barbara states "What annoys me is that people



say ‘oh they won’t be able for that’ I just think if you don’t challenge them, you are never giving them the opportunity to realise can they do it or not” (Barbara 146)

Similarly there are contradictions in Barbara’s contribution that affirm the tendency of class *habitus* to create and consolidate forms of social capital that can be employed to sustain one’s status in the relevant fields of power (Apple, 2004) While her reference to “there are going to be a number of children in your class who are on a lower, lower level anyway and they are not going to get the basics” (Barbara 146) indicates that Barbara has not escaped the influence of this pervasive ‘acceptance’ culture, her expression of disapproval at high performing students not being catered for adequately in DEIS schools (Barbara 146) reflects her attempt to unravel the often unconscious influence of a liberal ideology whose starting premise is based on an acceptance of a certain degree of inequality While Barbara’s childhood encounter with the vicissitudes of essentialism was a jolt out of what remains for many a subconscious journey through an education system designed to ensure middle class ‘success’, Ciara’s experience as a working class child attending a designated disadvantaged school gave her a personal insight into the effect of such negative thinking on working class students Ciara’s story is also consistent with Galman’s (2009) findings which testify to the ability of working class teachers to critique and construct a ‘better story’ about teaching than some of the ones they know and hear Her belief that essentialism is not embedded in her school’s culture could also be interrupted as a manifestation of her ability to tell a ‘better story’ <sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ciara’s assertion that a ‘fixed ability’ thesis is not an influencing force amongst the Limefield teaching staff is corroborated by findings that show that the Limefield cohort is the least committed school cohort to a ‘fixed ability’ thesis with only 1/7 of its participants expressing commitment to such an ideology in contrast to 8/18 across the entire sample

Although Ciara alludes to the prevalence of such an assertion in the profession in general, she is adamant that neither her teaching colleagues in Limefield nor she is culpable in this regard

I would never see the children as disadvantaged children I would have the same expectations for these children as I would have if I had gone to work in a school that wasn't disadvantaged I expect the same of them and I think everyone else in the school is the same (Ciara 150)

Conversely this defence of her staff could be interpreted as being indicative of the influence of the middle class habitus that her professional status has bestowed upon her, while also reflecting the recurring patterns of social class outlook that are inculcated by amongst other things – people's places of work and their culture

### **7.3. An Ideology of Control**

Deficit based assumptions based around the perceived need to enforce a strict disciplinary regime amongst working class students are found to be central in explaining the strong influence of an 'ideology of control' amongst participants working in the DEIS 1 setting<sup>34</sup> This section looks at the reasons behind the continued investment in a control ideology in the two DEIS 1 schools – Limefield and Millplace, and the limiting effect it has on the difference they can make in social justice terms The critical role professional experience plays in determining teachers' 'readiness' to resist its

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<sup>34</sup> A comparative analysis of commitment levels to 'adopting a devolved, power sharing approach to classroom management' according to DEIS categorisation shows that the proportion of DEIS 2 (Tupper) participants (4/5) expressing a commitment to incorporating elements of this democratic approach into their daily practice is higher than that of the DEIS 1 cohort (7/13)

conservative influence is also examined. The analysis also foregrounds the influence of what Apple (2000a, 2000b) terms as ‘conservative modernization’ on the global and national policy landscape and illuminates the limiting effect it has had on pedagogies.

### ***7.3.1 High Stakes Teacher Evaluation and its Role in Reinforcing an ‘Ideology of Control’***

The level of teaching experience was found to be a significant factor influencing participant commitment to ‘adopting a devolved, power sharing approach to classroom management’, with the more experienced cohort of teachers (6-9 years teaching experience) exhibiting a greater willingness to adopt a democratic approach to classroom management than their less experienced counterparts. It is also significant that Tupper (DEIS 2) which has the highest concentration of teachers in the 6-9 years experience bracket (3/6) also has the highest expressed commitment levels to ‘adopting a devolved, power sharing approach’.<sup>35</sup> These findings are consistent with recent Irish based research that consistently indicates a high degree of concern amongst NQTs in relation to managing classroom discipline (Inspectorate of DES, 2005a, Killeavy & Murphy, 2006), and thus making them more likely to be influenced by a school culture that values authoritative classroom management.

Limefield is the least experienced cohort in terms of teaching experience. It is therefore significant that they are also the cohort that feels most under pressure to maintain firm control of their respective classes. A significant situated school factor that helps to reinforce this concern is the high value the principal of Limefield places on

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<sup>35</sup> Three of the five Tupper participants have between 6 and 9 years teaching experience in comparison to 2/6 of Millplace’s participants and 1/7 of the Limefield cohort.

teachers' willingness and ability to enforce a strict discipline regime in their respective classes. Some teachers felt that their ability to maintain control was used by their principal as an evaluative tool to assess their 'performance', a view expressed by Moira, Ciara and Fiona. Recounting a direct quote from her principal, Moira believes that her principal has formed the view that teachers are "not cut out for teaching if you [teachers] are having a problem with a challenging child" (Moira 162), while Ciara feels that "it would be very frowned upon if you were to send a child to the office [because you did not have control over the child]" (Ciara 165). Conversely, compliance with an ideology of control is rewarded with positive reinforcement from the schools' 'senior management', as Fiona outlines: "then somebody will walk in and say 'oh aren't they a lovely quite class' and then it's clicking that's what's important" (Fiona 168). Consequently, feeling isolated when faced with a challenging situation when the support of their principal is required: "there would have been times when you would need someone more senior, right at the top, to help you out with something and that would be a challenge" (Moira, 161), coupled with their desire to avoid gaining unwanted attention from their principal in relation to their perceived inability to discipline their students has contributed to a defensive mindset becoming entrenched amongst the staff of Limefield. Their alignment with an authoritative classroom management style reflects the influence of this performance anxiety and the associated defensiveness, one which is intensified in light of their limited teaching experience and the associated desire to seek institutional affirmation. As a junior school, this emphasis on control and discipline creates tension between these teachers' desire to exhibit a caring and friendly disposition to the young children that they teach, and their felt pressure to comply with institutional norms.

In contrast the DEIS 2 (Tupper) cohort appears not to be consumed by such concerns with maintaining discipline. In light of the relatively high concentration of relatively experienced teachers among the Tupper cohort, the findings point to the role professional experience plays in assuaging such anxieties. There is also a marked contrast in reported styles of leadership, with Anna outlining her new Principal's commitment to a distributive style of leadership that encourages his teaching staff to adopt an agentic disposition towards their interactions with students and parents<sup>36</sup>. Anna states "He doesn't see any barriers. He just says right this is what you would like to do, this is what is available" (Anna 208). His ability to think positively and consider any perceived obstacle to the realisation of this vision as surmountable is highlighted by Anna as a leadership trait that she finds particularly inspiring.

#### **7.4 Increasing Influence of a 'Performativity Culture'**

The harmful effects of essentialist thinking and its misrecognition of educational differences as stemming from 'individual giftedness' rather than class-based differences (Mills, 2008), are compounded by the effects of the growth of a 'performativity' culture that has placed increasing emphasis on evaluating student and teacher performance on the basis of attainment in standardised tests, an assessment process that favours middle

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<sup>36</sup> Although Anna outlines her new Principal's commitment to 'authentic leadership' (Bhindi & Dugnan, 1997), a style of leadership that advocates a strong sense of collegiality and co-operation among the school staff and students, and one that encapsulates both Freire and Gramsci's hope that teachers can be agents of societal transformation, the supporting evidence that she provides is in relation to her principal encouraging his staff to adopt a more interventionist approach to dealing with the care needs of students. The influence of this leadership style is discussed in Chapter Eight.

class students (O'Brien, 2008) This section which is divided into two main sections commences with an initial exploration of participants' views on the forces at play that are driving the performativity agenda in education, and assesses the influence this agenda is having on their practice and their understandings of 'making a difference' School cultural factors are also examined The DEIS 1 cohort's heightened awareness and conformity to institutionally embedded cultures of performativity is identified as a significant factor in helping to explain their more demonstrative and strident commitment to 'pedagogies of the same' The second section looks at the 'odd' effects of the performativity culture that can result in participants feeling affirmed by their students' performance in standardised assessments, despite challenging the educational legitimacy of the assessments

#### ***7.4.1 Increasing Pressures in Relation to Testing***

The pressure to produce consistently high class scores in standardised literacy and numeracy assessments is identified by participants as having a significant impact on their practice Twelve of the eighteen participants (Fiona, Bernie, Marta, Donna, Ciara, Linda, Hannah, Frances, Claire, Ryan, Leona and Anna) outline the pressure they experience as a result of their engagement with the formal testing process Pressure associated with standardised testing is a much greater concern amongst the DEIS 1 cohort with 10/13 of participants citing such pressures in comparison to 2/5 of the Tupper's participants It is the perceived source of this pressure amongst the DEIS 1 cohort that helps to shed light on its influence on participants' practice In comparison to the views expressed by Tupper's participants, it is noticeable that participants from the

two DEIS 1 schools are more animated in articulating their awareness of the associated pressure, and the inhibiting influence this pressure has on their capacity to implement a more transformative praxis. The Limefield and Millplace cohorts identify differing sources of ‘performativity’ pressure. While 4/7 Limefield participants (Bernie, Marta, Ciara and Fiona) believe that the primary source of this pressure emanates from the emphasis their principal places on test results, it is the implicit expectation that results will improve as a result of the implementation of the aforementioned literacy and numeracy initiatives that the Millplace participants (Frances and Hannah) cite as the primary source of their pressure.

#### ***7.4.1.1 Limefield: The ‘Internalisation’ of Institutional ‘Performativity’ Pressure***

While traditionally there has been less emphasis placed on standardised testing in junior schools, the Limefield cohort demonstrates a heightened awareness of the increasing pressure attached to ‘performativity’ with 6/7 of their participants highlighting and critiquing the aforementioned pressure. Four out of seven Limefield participants (Fiona, Bernie, Marta and Ciara) identify the primary source of their ‘performativity’ pressure arising from the emphasis their principal places on standardised literacy and numeracy test results, and the implication that they are used to evaluate teacher as well as student performance. Bernie states “you are quite conscious that maybe at the office that my results are being compared with the results next door and you are aware of that” (Bernie 212). Teachers who work in large schools where there are multiple class levels may also be more likely to experience pressure from such

a comparative culture, a conclusion that Marta's reflects upon "because of the fact that we have four classes So like you are going to be compared" (Marta 210)

Although there is evidence of some participant resistance to this culture of 'performance' assessment, the 'internalisation' of this performance orientated culture is a noticeable feature of Marta, Ciara and Linda's contributions. Marta and Ciara's justification of the use of test scores as a way of evaluating teacher 'performance' is embodied in Ciara's belief that test scores "are a reflection on how you're teaching" (Ciara 99). The contradictions present in Linda and Ciara's naming of the sources of this pressure also reflects the pervasiveness of an internalisation process. Despite naming their principal as a primary source of the pressure, Linda and Ciara also partially attribute this pressure to self generated expectations in relation to student performance with Linda feeling that "we put yourself under a little bit of pressure" (Linda 230), while Ciara's desire to achieve positive outcomes results in a heightened sense of frustration if results are not as good as she would have initially hoped for "It would kind of just annoy me if I felt that a child had improved and that they didn't score higher in the test That would just irritate me" (Ciara 102). It is also significant that 6/6 participants (Fiona, Marta, Donna, Ciara, Linda and Ryan) who testify to feeling professionally self-affirmed by positive test results are working in DEIS 1 schools, with 5/6 teaching in Limefield.



#### *7.4.1.2 Millplace: External Sources of Performativity Pressure*

The Millplace cohort expresses similar levels of pressure to those referenced by the Limefield participants with 4/6 of its participants (Hannah, Frances, Claire and Ryan) referencing ‘performativity’ pressure. In contrast to the institutional nature of Limefield’s performance related pressure, the Millplace cohort identify the source of their performativity pressure arising from recently introduced government policy. The expectation that results will improve as a result of the implementation of the range of DEIS literacy and numeracy initiatives is identified by Hannah and Frances as a major source of pressure. Frances’ recount of the anxiety she experienced when she discovered that a number of her students preformed poorly in a recent standardised test reflects the impact of this pressure. Frances states “there was a huge drop [in test scores] with some of the kids, and definitely there was a huge pressure there from people wondering is it what we are doing in class, or what is going on that so many of them dropped?” (Frances 104). Hannah’s sense of frustration at the Inspectorate’s lack of appreciation of the challenges that teachers in designated disadvantaged schools face on a consistent basis when evaluating their progress in the area of literacy and numeracy, is another example of the strain such pressure places on teachers. Hannah states “Seriously get a grip. Come into our classes and look at what we are dealing with on a daily basis” (Hannah 132). Other systemic sources of pressure referenced by Millplace participants (Frances and Claire) include the newly introduced compulsory reporting of standardised test scores to parents, with Claire stating “you don’t want to tell them [parents], you don’t want to go on about how low [standardised test results] they are either” (Claire 142). Ryan associates the rise in pressure stemming from the media’s reporting of

internationally comparative literacy and numeracy surveys. A common theme running through the Millplace cohort's contributions is the perceived external origins of this 'performativity' pressure, which contrasts with the Limefield cohort's internalisation of the merits of the testing process.

With the concept of 'success' in DEIS schools being increasingly linked with improvements in scores on standardised tests and assessments, the pressure on all teachers is intensely felt. For beginning teachers who may already be attempting "to meet the virtually unattainable standards of pedagogical perfection they set themselves" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 126), working in disadvantaged schools where there is comparatively lower levels of academic achievement in relation to other school settings (McGough, 2002, Weir & Eivers, 1998) further exacerbates this pressure. The sense of anxiety surrounding the 'level' of the class and their ability to master the content examined in tests remains a constant site of emotional conflict for the teacher (Kitching, 2009). The negative effect this emotional conflict can have on teacher motivation is reflected upon by Frances and Sarah as they discuss the deflationary effect perceived poor results can have on teachers' motivation, an effect that is exacerbated by their propensity to make negative comparisons between the results their students achieve in standardised tests to those achieved by students in other settings, with Sarah stating

I know there is a girl, she is a friend and she came over to the house and she teaches in a very small country school and she said, 'oh I would die if I [one of my students] got anything lower than a seven [STen score]',<sup>37</sup> and I could just

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<sup>37</sup> Primary teachers use 'STen scores' to tell parents how students perform in standardised tests. STen scores go from one to ten.

see myself and the other girl that teaches in a DEIS Band 1 school and we were just looking at each other going ‘we are failing as teachers’ (Sarah 127)

The entrenchment of such negative thinking amongst teachers contributes to the creation of an air of inevitability around their students’ incapacity to achieve academic excellence, which serves to further erode their ability to challenge its hegemonic influence

#### ***7.4.2 The Increasing Specification of Classroom Practice***

The findings in relation to ‘liberating pedagogies’ demonstrated that across the entire sample there was a moderate degree of engagement with such pedagogies, with 10/18 of participants having ‘good to strong’ commitment to the three dimensions of liberating practice identified. The link between the dominance of a ‘performativity’ orientated culture in the two DEIS 1 schools, and the implementation of ‘pedagogies of the same’ that are narrow and deductive in nature, is outlined in the following section. Evidence described in this section indicates that the increasing specification of curricula and classroom practices that the roll out of the DEIS programme (DES, 2005) and the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011) entails, has reached into the pedagogic core of teachers’ work, and is influencing the type of difference teachers see themselves making

#### *7.4.2.1 'Teaching to the Test'*

Assessing teachers' performance on the basis of their classes' test scores makes the testing process a high stakes one (Conway & Murphy, 2013), and intensifies the temptation to manipulate the scores. This is reflected in the fact that 4/5 (Fiona, Bernie, Ciara, Linda and Leona) participants that discuss the contentious issue of 'teaching to the test' are from Limefield. Fiona and Bernie reference the temptation to 'teach to the test' with Bernie stating that "you almost wanted to coach them for the tests" (Bernie 212), while Linda admits that she is not as "rigid" in her pedagogical approach once the testing process is completed. Ciara is particularly candid in her admission that she engages in test 'preparation' with her class, Ciara states "I thought in my first year, I didn't really, I kind of dished out the tests, whereas this year I am doing prep for it" (Ciara 105). Narrowing her focus to 'testable items' while also placing an increased emphasis on drill are deemed by Ciara to be the most effective way to get good results. Ciara states "I would do a lot of you know drill because I think that's what gets results" (Ciara 89). Sacrificing student comprehension in order to achieve high scores is a practice that Ciara is willing to engage in, reflected in her admission that she is "not really focused on whether they are really getting what I'm teaching. It is more like will they be able to do it [the test]" (Ciara 109). The influence of managerial concerns surrounding technical control and 'efficiency' as assessed through the procurement of positive test results has contributed to the growing complexity of teacher identity (Troman, 2008). This development also has the potential to constrain socially agentic action by educators, by intensifying the focus on a performativity culture that shifts

teachers' professional identities in order to make them more accountable to client demand and external judgment (Apple, 2004)

#### ***7.4.2.2 The Valuing of 'Pedagogies of the Same'***

The dual focused evaluative framework that the principal of Limefield employs to assess teacher 'performance' on the basis of their ability to enforce strict discipline, and 'produce' positive test scores is a manifestation of her commitment to a 'banking' approach to education. In contrast Donna believes that pedagogies that encourage students to critically consider reality are "often perceived as chaos" and "wasting time" (Donna 32), and claims that "different members of management would be delighted if something boring was going on" such as 'colouring' or having children 'all lined up doing a poem' (Donna 33). Fiona concurs with Donna's critique and feels that activities that position the students' learning in their contextual reality, such as visits to the library and school walks, are perceived by her principal as evidence that she is 'doing nothing' (Fiona 123). Fiona believes that acquiescence on behalf of staff members to a 'banking' concept is reflected in their internalisation of a culture of competitive compliance, with teachers in competition with each other to receive praise for their 'template art' (Fiona 164). Fiona states "literally it's this big competition, whose class do the best art that's who gets the praise and you're kind of made to think that's what they look for, that's what I'm going to do" (Fiona 166 & 167). Empirical evidence of the pervasiveness of this pedagogical 'sameness' is reflected in 2/7 of the Limefield cohort expressing commitment to the 'promotion of experiential learning'. The relatively lower proportion of the Limefield cohort (3/7) involved in the provision of extra curricular

activities relative to the other school sites could also be interpreted as further evidence of the effect the Limefield principal's value system has on teacher engagement with non academically related activities

#### ***7.4.2.3 The Reductive Influence of the Literacy and Numeracy Drive on Curriculum Coverage***

The time demands associated with participation in the range of DEIS literacy and numeracy has inevitably had a detrimental impact on the implementation of other curricular areas, as 7/18 of the total sample (Marta, Ciara, Frances, Hannah, Sarah, Linda and Ryan)<sup>38</sup> express having great difficulty in covering the full range of subjects in light of these aforementioned time demands. Although all three schools are participating in these DEIS literacy and numeracy initiatives, there appears to be a greater intensity of focus on these initiatives in the DEIS 1 setting. This heightened concern is reflected in the fact that 6/7 participants (Marta, Ciara, Frances, Hannah, Linda and Ryan) that comment on the reductive impact the increased focus on literacy and numeracy is having on the successful implementation of the primary school curriculum, are teaching in DEIS 1 schools. Hannah sums up the sense of professional anxiety that she feels as a result of her participation in these intervention programmes and the impact they have on curriculum coverage. Hannah states:

Do you know what is the biggest pressure now is at the moment in our school, it is DEIS itself. Being a DEIS school right, being designated a DEIS school and

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<sup>38</sup> While feeling confined by the time constraints placed on their instructional time in light of their participation in the DEIS literacy and numeracy initiatives, Marta and Linda also welcome the structure that the programmes offer.

getting all the funds from being a DEIS school has brought so many extra pressures First Steps Reading, First Steps Writing, First Steps Oral [Literacy Programmes], like how do you fit everything into a day? (Hannah 132)

The inevitable tension that is created between the pressure to produce results and the parallel pressure to implement a curriculum that is ideologically at odds with the aforementioned performativity culture is palpable in Ciara's following account "It's a contradiction because like you just said, now the testing is coming and everyone is up to ninety trying to get results and you're focused on that, and then on the other hand you are meant to be doing this whole holistic education" (Ciara 159) Prioritising the development of their students' literacy and numeracy skills at the expense of other subjects, such as SESE (Social, Environmental and Scientific Education) is perceived by Ciara and Marta as a legitimate and justifiable trade off, Marta states

There are the subjects that do get pushed to the back Like definitely drama, and music, and SESE really does get shortened through the day You see like, a half an hour in maths you can't [get 'core' subjects such as maths covered in such a short time span] I know they are important subjects but you do have to have priorities (Marta 150)

This narrowing of the focus that Ciara and Marta's contributions testify to, is deemed necessary in light of a number of reports that pinpointed the steady decline in literacy and numeracy levels in schools serving marginalised communities (Weir, 2003, Weir, Mills, & Ryan, 2002) While recognising the importance of children attaining good literacy and numeracy standards, the nature and application of these skills is of equal importance There is a need to position the development of these skills within a

pedagogical framework that encourages students' critical intervention into reality (Freire, 1996, p 34), as failure to do so results in primacy being given to an isolationist, skills based approach that is technical and reductive in character. Such reductionism helps to perpetuate the current tide of liberalism that advocates a narrowing of the curriculum, and a move towards an objectivist driven educational philosophy.

The number of participants who welcome the structured nature of the DEIS literacy and numeracy programmes are exclusively concentrated in the two DEIS 1 schools, with 7/13 participants (Fiona, Marta, Moira, Linda, Barbara, Claire and Grace) feeling that the defined nature of the programmes' content and pedagogical approaches assure them of the efficacy of their practice in this area. This positive disposition is reflected in the following comments from Moira, Barbara and Marta respectively.

I like the structure and I like the programmes (Moira 157)

I do love First Steps. I absolutely love it and I love the structure because I am quite a structured person (Barbara 182)

Yea, we have a set timetable or whatever. It's brilliant like. It is really structured. So I kind of would say that I am structured as well (Marta 149)

The professional confidence and pedagogical clarity that such structured, prescriptive programmes bring to teachers, many of whom may be unsure about the most effective way of teaching literacy and numeracy, is highlighted by Fiona.

Before then I think teachers were totally at sea and we were constantly being told that literacy was so important and yet we thought what are we supposed to be doing? How do we do it on a day to day basis? Whereas now we have this



literacy hour going in the morning and everyone does their literacy hour and it timetabled, broken down into 15, 20 minute little chunks (Fiona 55)

Implementing the relevant programmes by sticking rigidly to the defined structures is something that Fiona references “I mean there is a very strict approach to them so like ‘Jolly Phonics’ [Phonics Programme] is just that programme, so we would implement that to the letter, and it’s really important in junior infants to get that going” (Fiona 55) Whether professional autonomy and judgment is sacrificed at the altar of conformity and consistency of approach is a legitimate question to raise at this juncture Linda’s desire for “ideally of course for someone to come in and say, ‘this is what you’ll do’ and what you cover, within reason, in your class” (Linda 127) hints at a willingness to surrender her right to professional autonomy and pedagogical freedom in order to feel assured that she is following the appropriate course, something that Claire and Marta also reference

No I like the structure of it Like I prefer to have right this is what we are doing and then I feel like I don’t have it No I like the First Steps (Claire 54)

I think it’s brilliant because you know exactly what you’re doing, where you should be (Marta 97)

Grace and Donna also welcome this objective driven, focused approach which is seen as the antidote to the previously discussed curriculum overload that so many teachers find a challenge, Donna states

I think that focused approach is necessary to cope with all that overload, because if you don’t you could just end up feeling like you are doing bits of everything like, bits of these huge schemes (Donna 88)

Rather than feeling that the programmes restrict their sense of professional autonomy and agency, the reported pedagogical clarity and structure that these programmes provide to participants' practice affirms their efficacy as teachers

#### ***7.4.3 Performativity and Professional Affirmation***

A similar pattern is observed in relation to participants' attitudes towards standardised testing. Rather than perceiving the increasing emphasis that is being placed on the testing process at primary level as a retrograde step, 6/18 participating teachers (Fiona, Marta, Donna, Ciara, Linda and Ryan) felt self-affirmed by their involvement in the process. The 'internalisation' of the aforementioned performance orientated culture amongst DEIS 1 participants is evidenced in the fact that 6/6 (Fiona, Marta, Donna, Ciara, Linda and Ryan) participants that feel professionally self-affirmed by positive results are teaching in that setting. It should also be noted that 5/6 of these participants work in Limefield.

The hegemonic influence this 'internalisation' process exerts and the 'oppressive reality' that it presents to its compliers is largely achieved by its ability to "absorb[s] those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness" (Freire, 1996, p. 33). The lack of critical awareness among participants in relation to the propensity of the testing process to help reinforce class bias is indicative of this absorption process. Fiona, Ciara, Donna and Frances are exceptions to this pattern of critical disengagement as they critically reflect upon what they perceive as the unfairness of the composition and the processes of testing. They raise questions

concerning the ability of standardised tests to assess a child's true ability Donna states "I don't think they are the holy grail of saying what a child is capable of or not, if you believe in multiple intelligences and stuff" (Donna 231) Recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of standardised tests reflects the process of critical reflection that these participants have engaged in, and the ability of such a process to illuminate the propensity of a liberal ideology to value specific forms of intelligence, i.e. the logical-mathematical and linguistic intelligences, and discriminate against a multitude of others

However despite this awareness of the hegemonic influence of formal testing, the contributions of these participants also point to the pervasive influence of the performativity culture reflected in their 'internalisation' of elements of its influence These 'odd' effects of the performativity culture are reflected in the contradictory and incompatible positions adopted by these participants in relation to their attitudes towards the testing process While Fiona, Ciara, Donna and Frances are critical of what they perceive to be the negative consequences of the increasing value being placed on standardised testing in their respective schools, 3/4 (Fiona, Ciara and Donna) also feel professionally self affirmed by positive test scores <sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> It is significant that not only are 4/4 of this cohort teaching in DEIS 1 schools, but 3/4 are Limefield participants, reflecting the heightened awareness amongst its participants of the detrimental impact of their principal's over emphasis on achieving good test scores

#### *7.4.3.1 'Odd' Effects of the Performativity Culture*

As previously stated 6/18 participating teachers (Fiona, Marta, Donna, Ciara, Linda and Ryan) felt self-affirmed by positive test results, with 3/6 of this named cohort (Marta, Ciara and Ryan) viewing the rise in test scores as objective evidence of the success of the range of DEIS literacy and numeracy programmes their schools are currently engaged in. Significantly, this improvement in test scores also gave them a real sense that they were making a difference in the lives of their students. This air of positivity is encapsulated in Ryan's assertion that his school has "been upping the grades on a regular basis during the four years of DEIS [Ryan uses 'DEIS' in reference to the aforementioned literacy and numeracy initiatives]" (Ryan 138). However it is the 'odd' effects of the performativity culture that provide us with a good insight into the complex and often contradictory influence of 'performativity' on teachers. These contradictory attitudes mirror the results from Troman's (2008) study on teacher attitudes towards state testing. Despite challenging the educational legitimacy and usefulness of the tests, participating teachers felt self-affirmed by the positive results, especially in schools serving marginalised communities (Troman, 2008).

These 'odd' effects are in evidence in Ciara's contradictory views on the role standardised testing should play in primary education. Ciara highlights the bias towards students with the greater capacity to absorb and retain knowledge, and criticises its failure to assess constructivist learning. Drawing on her own experience of testing from her school days, Ciara critiques the inherent middle class bias built into a system based on a narrow meritocratic system.

It always suited me when I was in secondary school and exams were fine because I was good I was able to waffle my way out of anything whereas I had friends who would have found an exam quite hard so Whereas I would always have scored great and they would have tried really hard and scored lower, whereas I kind of wouldn't have had to put much effort into it It's not really fair (Ciara 109)

Ciara's insights into her personal experiences of the testing process echo O'Brien's (2008) assertion of the profound and disabling consequences of such an inherently class biased assessment process However despite Ciara's protestations about the inequity and unfairness of the tests' composition, the 'odd' effects of the performativity culture are seen in her later justification of their evaluative function "I suppose a test shows to some people who aren't in the class and seeing their work that there has been an improvement" (Ciara 107) Despite critiquing the limitations of standardised tests, and the constraints the culture surrounding it can impose on teachers' pedagogical ambitions, Linda and Fiona also reference the personal fulfillment they experience when their classes achieve positive scores in the tests Linda highlights the "self gratification" (Linda 230) she gets from achieving good results with her class "you want your class to do well and you want it to be a good reflection on that hard work you put in for yourself You need a little bit of self gratification there" (Linda 230) While Fiona recalls the sense of self worth and efficacy she experiences when her class perform well "I'm delighted to hear it, you know, somebody to say 'God, your class did so well'" (Fiona 177) While this cohort of six participants view themselves as competent implementers of instrumental testing processes, the limited evidence of participant reflection on the

effects of this practice raises concerns about their ability to resist their deliberating effects (Troman, 2008) Such engagement in critical reflection on their role relative to the continued influence of the dominant group's 'cultural arbitrary' is essential, if teachers are to initiate a process of real change through their practice Gardner's (1983, 1993) theory of multiple intelligences, and Bourdieu's critique of the role cultural capital plays in the attainment of educational success (Bourdieu, 1986) suggests "that the dispositions required for successful test taking and preparation, favour middle-class students" (O'Brien, 2008, p 145)

### **7.5 Pedagogical Blindness to 'Diversity' – the Epitome of 'Pedagogies of the Same'**

An exploration of the factors contributing to participants' lack of engagement with the theme of 'diversity' crystallises the influence of the policy, professional and institutional terrain on reinforcing a culture of consensualism around 'pedagogies of the same' The preceding chapter outlines the widespread extent of participant complicity (either conscious or unconscious) with a culture of assimilation across the three school sites Such a non interventionist, 'hands off' approach to the 'diversity' question which characterises this pedagogical inertia is consistent with a pedagogical approach that promotes conformity and 'sameness', and consequently 'misrecognises' what socially just pedagogies ought to look like in a contemporary Ireland

The fear of aggravating an already potentially sensitive situation for students from minority ethnic backgrounds that may be subjected to racially motivated abuse is one of the primary reasons articulated by participants to explain their reluctance to engage too

deeply with the theme of diversity. Participants also cite time constraints in light of pressure to prioritise literacy and numeracy as another significant factor that impinges upon their ability to focus on the issues pertaining to diversity.

#### ***7.5.1 Fear and Time: Factors Influencing Reluctance of Participants to Highlight Student Diversity***

This next section examines the reasons given by participants to explain their reluctance to broach the issue of student diversity in the classroom. Time constraints owing to pressure to cover the curriculum, coupled with a fear that such a course of action may make diversity a divisive issue in their classrooms, are reasons cited by participants to explain their preference to assimilate minority ethnic students into the prevailing cultural norms of the school.

The fear of aggravating an already potentially sensitive situation for students from diverse social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds that may be subjected to racially motivated abuse is highlighted by 5/18 of participants (Donna, Ciara, Ryan, Conor and Leona) as one of the primary reasons for their reluctance to discuss racial differences with students. Ryan states “you don’t want to highlight differences either and then find that the differences that you have highlighted become a divisive thing, and people start getting slagged because of their race or because they come from a different country” (Ryan 198). This shared fear of placing some of their students from diverse backgrounds in an uncomfortable position is also the motivation behind Donna, Conor and Ciara’s reluctance to engage in a more robust treatment of social justice issues relating to children’s social and cultural heritage. Conor states

What I would think of most of all in that situation is the actual kids themselves from say, be it from Africa that come to Ireland I think if you start making a big thing of you, you know, 'oh imagine what they had to come through to be here' and the impoverishment and all this you would be making them feel very self conscious (Conor 182)

Instead Donna and Conor favour an approach that focuses on the positive aspects of diversity rather than highlighting issues of injustice perpetrated against the African community. Deliberately avoiding exposing her class to perceived negative representations of African history and culture, and preferring to concentrate on more positive representations of African society, reflects Donna's modus operandi. While the willingness to highlight the positive aspects of children's historical and cultural background is to be commended, such an uneven treatment of a people's social history contributes significantly to the further depoliticisation of the classroom by denying local and global histories of oppression which ultimately serves to perpetuate existing inequalities (Apple, 1979, 2004)

Significantly Frank and Conor, both of whom teach in Tupper, a DEIS 2 school, are two of the few participants to explicitly refer to social diversity while discussing their rationale for playing down the social differences between students in their school. In order to avoid working class students feeling self conscious about their economic circumstances relative to the middle class students, Conor sees it as his role to ameliorate any possible negative effects that such comparisons could have on these students. Conor states



I would be trying to play down any differences maybe that there are between pupils but I suppose by nature some of them are going to be telling you about their three week holiday somewhere, or their three holidays a year, and even at Christmas you can tell that it is tough for some kids that don't have the same privileges (Conor 110)

While DEIS 1 schools statistically have a greater degree of ethnic and cultural diversity (Darmody, Smyth, & McCoy, 2012), Conor's awareness of social diversity is perhaps amplified by the setting that he teaches in, as DEIS Band 2 schools tend to have a greater degree of social class diversity among the school population than DEIS Band 1 schools, a pattern that his colleague Frank highlights "Tupper is a strange school, in that it is a disadvantage school, but also there is a lot of very wealthy people There is a big gap" (Frank 82) In the case of Conor and Frank this heightened awareness appears to have had the effect of focusing attention more sharply on the gap between the different social classes, rather than stimulating an active engagement with the topic

The need to prioritise their students' 'learning' (Linda 278), and the associated time demands that this academic emphasis places on participants, is cited by Linda and Sarah as the primary reason behind their reluctance to engage too deeply with themes of 'difference' in their daily practice, with Sarah stating "It would be at back of your mind, you are obviously aware of it but I think to be honest there's not that much time that you could celebrate all the different cultures and take it all in" (Sarah 59) Despite being aware of the importance of working with and valuing social and cultural

difference, they feel the practicalities of the teaching day, and the range of demands it places on teachers' time, contributes to the peripheralisation of 'difference'

We're aware of the different cultures and you know every teacher knows the countries where their children are from and it is probably marked on a map somewhere but I'd say then without going into that too much that it is probably just focused back more on to learning (Linda 278)

Not only does this focus on academic achievement reiterate the pervasiveness of the influence of the performativity agenda and the pedagogical reductionism that it promotes, the low incidence of working with and valuing diversity also has quite profound social justice implications for students, particularly "in a globalised age of diasporic flows [and] multiculturalism" (Lingard & Keddie, 2013, p 441)

## **7.6 Care and its Role in Socially Just Pedagogies**

Another aspect of teachers' professional role that has profound social justice implications for students is in relation to care. The primacy given by the majority of participants (15/18) to the care dimension of their professional role in their understandings of 'making a difference' is a notable feature of the study's findings. In the context of growing inequality, the need for such a high level of social support and care offered to students is intensified in marginalised and impoverished communities. Care 'work' is an emotionally demanding effort and participants should be recognised for providing such support. An exploration of participants' perception of a care ethic not only affirms the importance of care practices, but also recognises the associated emotional engagement required to raise student consciousness of social justice. This

exploration also has a focus on influencing institutional factors that help to uncover differences in emphasis and practices across the three school sites. The differentiated value placed upon these practices by the prevailing individual school cultures is identified as a central determining factor in explaining these aforementioned differences.

### ***7.6.1 Limefield: Low Value on Care Work***

The commitment of the principal of Limefield to a 'banking' philosophy, and its propensity to narrow children's educational experience, and the limiting effect it has on teachers' sense of professional agency and autonomy is reflected upon by Fiona. Her principal's focus on test scores, basic skills, and 'control', and the narrow definition of 'success' that it promotes has, according to Fiona, meant that a low value has been attached to the importance of care work in Limefield. The lowly value that teachers' care work is given is reflected in the level of recognition Fiona receives for her class's performance in standardised tests. "If they do really well in the MIST [Middle Infant Screening Test], that's acknowledged. Well, in our school, it is" (Fiona 176), and in the absence of recognition for the care dimension to her role. "I mean nobody is going to acknowledge that fact that your children are so happy and you're so kind to them" (Fiona 176). The provision of a socially just pedagogical approach which strikes the balance between engaging in pedagogies that are cognitively challenging, and connected to the real world experiences of her students, and ensuring this development takes place in a safe, happy environment is an equilibrium that Fiona aspires to. However she finds this difficult to achieve, especially when the school leadership is invested in market ideology and a drive for greater 'teacher accountability'. Fiona states:

I think it's a pity, it will take away from what's actually important I think

They do need to do well in school Obviously that's what you're there to do, to educate them but I think the way that you do it is equally important (Fiona 179)

This perceived absence of recognition of care practices and the associated emotional intelligence required echo Baker et al 's (2004) criticism of the system's failure to recognise the importance of emotions in learning as "a denial of the educational needs of both teachers and students as emotional beings" (p 164)

#### ***7.6.2 The Social Justice Implications of an Exclusive Care Focus***

In contrast there is a shared consensus among the Millplace cohort about the need for them to prioritise the care dimension of their professional role, with 4/6 Millplace participants (Frances, Hannah, Barbara and Claire) feeling that the academic achievement and cognitive development of their students is a secondary concern in light of the acuteness of their students' care needs Hannah's belief that "education mightn't be the priority for these kids, and it really isn't a priority" (Hannah 14), and the importance of concentrating on making "those hours happy for the kids" (Hannah 14), is indicative of this boundary setting in relation to their professional role and the difference they feel they can make Frances' and Barbara's contribution also reflects their clarity in relation to what they perceive to be their students' primary needs, with Barbara viewing it as her "primary concern" (Barbara 224) and Frances stating that she would be satisfied if her students were "happy enough in here and that they see school as a safe place, as a positive place" (Frances 84) This concern with creating a safe and caring educational environment has an inverse correlation with Frances' concern about developing her

students academically, a pursuit that she considers to be a peripheral priority, articulated in her reference to considering it “a bonus” if they “learned something” (Frances 84) Although indicative of the “extra caring responsibility” (Barbara 09) that she perceives her professional role entailing, wanting her students to feel that school “is like a holiday” (Barbara 221) and a respite from the difficult home life they endure does raise concerns about how she construes her professional caring responsibilities

From a Freirean perspective, caring for the well being of the child and their development includes attending to students’ educational progress and literacy In contrast to some of her colleagues, Hannah’s perception of her care role embodies both a care and academic focus with the two roles indelibly linked and mutually complementary Her recount of the role she played in helping a child with special educational needs take his first steps to read is in harmony with a Freirean interpretation of teachers’ care role Hannah states

If they pick up something small, you’re like, well that’s an achievement, you know something small or you know the one that I take, the kid with special educational needs, he was illiterate at the start of the year He is reading little junior infant books now You think that in 4<sup>th</sup> class that’s not a lot, that’s massive, for him, that he can actually do that (Hannah 112)

As Hannah’s account demonstrates, it would be unrepresentative to say that these lines of demarcation are tightly observed by all participants However, a recurring feature of the contributions from the Millplace cohort is the influence a consensual understanding of their professional role has on lessening their focus on the implementation of

‘intellectually demanding pedagogies’ which require higher order thinking, deep knowledge, and substantive conversations and connections to the world beyond the classroom (Newmann & Associates, 1996) While the care they provide to their students is necessary, it is not sufficient to maximise pedagogical effects, and the significant social justice implications that this failure involves (Lingard & Keddle, 2013, p 439)

## **7.7 Conclusion**

This chapter examined the underlying ideologies influencing participants’ understandings of ‘making a difference’ While the role the confluence of ideological influences play in the perpetuation of a pedagogical conservatism that seeks to treat students all in the same way is a primary focus, it is important at this juncture to examine expectations around teachers’ capacity to effect transformative change Hannah’s reference to what she perceives as the unrealistic and unreasonable assumption that teachers ‘can change the world’ (Hannah 108) provides a catalyst for such reflection While this study is predicated upon the assumption that the quality of pedagogies is a social justice issue, it is important not to overstate the social justice possibilities for pedagogy and teachers, particularly when located against the continual weakening of the state’s response to poverty and social inequality in recent times Recognition of the personal sacrifices required to actively resist ideologies of the ‘New Alliance’ (Singh et al , 2005) also provides a contextual backdrop when evaluating participants’ practice

A misrecognition of the differences in students' academic performances and capabilities as resulting from 'individual giftedness' rather than class based effects exerts a considerable influence on what participants' perceive their professional role to entail. Lowered teacher expectations of students, and the 'normalisation' of low student attainment in designated disadvantaged schools are just two of the negative teacher effects that can be attributed to the shared acceptance held by 8/18 participants, that there *are* limits to what *their* students' can achieve. Institutional factors are also identified as playing a role in reinforcing these implicit cultural assumptions amongst the Tupper and Millplace cohorts. The strong correlation that is found to exist between these participants' belief in a fixed ability thesis, and the low levels of performativity pressure they report as experiencing is interpreted to be a manifestation of a culture of shared acceptance of the limits the disadvantaged setting imposes on their capacity to 'make a difference'. The legitimising effect such a school consensus has on reinforcing an ontological belief in their right to act as arbiters of their students' intellectual capacity, and the level of intellectual demand they feel their students are capable of has significant implications for students' access to socially just pedagogies (Lingard & Keddie, 2013)

The growth of a 'performativity' culture that has placed increasing emphasis on evaluating teacher performance on the basis of student attainment on standardised tests, is a further example of the New Alliance and its "tension-ridden notions of doing much, much more with much, much less, worker accountability, performance standardization, state testing, and nationalised curriculum" (Singh et al, 2005, p. 14). With 12/18 of the

total cohort outlining the pressure they experience as a result of their engagement with the formal testing process, the extent of its influence is clearly seen. Pressure associated with standardised testing is a much greater concern amongst the DEIS 1 cohort. While the 'internalisation' of a performance orientated culture is a noticeable feature of the Limefield cohort's contributions, in contrast the Millplace cohort identify the source of their experienced performativity pressure arising from the implicit expectation that results will improve as a result of the implementation of DEIS literacy and numeracy initiatives. 'Teaching to the test', which a number of Limefield participants admit to engaging in, is indicative of the intensity of performativity pressure felt by the Limefield cohort, and the reductive effect such practices have on the implementation of non-testable curricular areas is also another bi-product of this pressurised environment. Although all three schools are participating in these DEIS literacy and numeracy initiatives, there appears to be a greater intensity of focus on these initiatives in the DEIS 1 setting. The emphasis the DEIS 1 cohort placed on measured levels of literacy and numeracy and their reporting of the attendant reductive impact it has on their implementation of the all curriculum subjects, reflects this intensity of focus. It is significant that rather than feeling the DEIS literacy and numeracy programmes restrict their sense of professional autonomy and agency, the reported pedagogical clarity and structure that these programmes provide to participants' practice affirms their efficacy as teachers. A similar pattern is observed in relation to participants' attitudes towards standardised testing. Rather than perceiving the increasing emphasis that is being placed on the testing process at primary level as a retrograde step, 6/18 participating teachers felt self-affirmed by their involvement in the process. It is perhaps the lack of critical



awareness among participants in relation to the propensity of the testing process to help reinforce class bias that best illuminates the hegemonic influence this internalisation process exerts. Mirroring the New Alliance and the odd mismatch of seemingly contradictory ideologies that have joined forces to integrate education policies, pedagogies, and politics into a contradictory amalgam (Singh et al, 2005), the influence of this odd combination of forces is seen in the contradictory and conflicting attitudes that participant teachers have towards standardised testing. Despite feeling self-affirmed by the positive results, the educational legitimacy and usefulness of the tests was also questioned by some participating teachers.

Another central ideological component of the eclectic mix of ideological influences that characterises the New Alliance, namely 'conservative modernization' (Apple 2000a, 2000b), and the limiting effect it has on pedagogies, is clearly in evidence in the strong influence of an 'ideology of control' amongst participants working in the DEIS 1 setting. The degree to which the respective school leaders are invested in such an ideology helps to partially explain the variances in the levels of commitment to a devolved, power sharing classroom management style across the schools sites. The critical role professional experience plays in determining teachers' capacity to resist its conservative influence is also illuminated, with the more experienced cohort of teachers (6-9 years teaching experience) exhibiting a greater willingness to adopt a democratic approach to classroom management than their less experienced counterparts.

The findings in relation to ‘diversity’ and ‘care’ both reflect a misrecognition of what socially just pedagogies look like in a contemporary Ireland. The research found that participants were committed to providing care and support for their students. While such care is necessary, it is not sufficient on its own to maximise pedagogical effects, and the significant social justice implications that this failure involves (Lingard & Keddie, 2013, p. 439). The shared consensus among the Millplace cohort that the academic development of their students is a secondary concern in light of the acuteness of their students’ care needs militates against the realisation of transformative pedagogies that are concerned with harnessing emotional responses to stimulate student thinking and development. The influence of this institutional consensualism is also in evidence in the widespread extent of participant complicity with a culture of assimilation across the three school sites. The non-interventionist, ‘hands off’ approach to the ‘diversity’ question is consistent with a pedagogical approach that promotes conformity and ‘sameness’.

Finally, in line with the study’s focus on identifying evidence of participant resistance to the constraining influence of these aforementioned ideological forces, participants’ personal narratives and the transformative possibilities that the fluid and dynamic nature of teachers’ narratives can facilitate, is in evidence in Barbara and Claire’s shared resistance to the deficit model. The limiting and liberating potential of habitus (Harker & May, 1993) is reflected in the findings which point to its capacity to act as both a promoter and inhibitor of social agency. Barbara and Claire’s ‘stories’ reflect the capacity of habitus to resist the forces of the field, embodied in this instance

by the 'circles of certainty' that are a pervasive influence at an institutional level. Conversely the heightened commitment to meritocratic individualism demonstrated by the 'Working Class-Close Proximity' cohort, similarly reflects the influence participants' life histories can have on the reinforcing cultural assumptions. An 'adhesion' to a meritocratic system from which they have derived considerable success, appears to reinforce a belief amongst this cohort that failure or success at school is a function of what the individual is or does (Drudy & Lynch, 1993), while also have a masking effect on their awareness of the role meritocracy plays in perpetuating inequality.

## Chapter Eight

### The Teacher-Parent Relationship

#### 8.1 Introduction

The interests of the oppressors lie in ‘changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them’,<sup>40</sup> for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1996, p 55)

In light of the subtleties and nuances that define the power structures of a modern ‘First World’ society, there are many challenges in directly applying Freire’s (1996) enlightening critique of the ‘submerged’ consciousness of the dispossessed classes of Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s to the contemporary educational context in Ireland (Downes & Downes, 2007). However, his deconstruction of the ‘paternalistic social action apparatus’ within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of ‘welfare recipients’ provides a lens through which teachers’ propensity to project, and indeed challenge, a limiting and disenfranchising vision of reality to parents is critiqued. In the teachers’ narratives their attitudes towards parents are viewed as a signifier of their willingness and capacity to incorporate a vision of social justice into their understanding of ‘making a difference’. The level of ideological consistency and

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<sup>40</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *La Pensée de Drouot, Aujourd’hui* (Paris), *ST El Pensamiento politico de la Derecha* (Buenos Aires, 1963), p 34

‘harmony’ between teachers’ pedagogical approach, and the nature of their professional engagement with parents is a central concern of this chapter

This chapter is in three parts. Teacher awareness of the power dynamics that influence the teacher-parent relationship is considered to be a prerequisite for the growth of transformative teacher agency in this area. In particular the role that a hierarchical power construct plays in manoeuvring working class parents into positions of subservience to authority figures such as teachers, is brought into clear focus in part one. Social class and the level of pre-service interaction with working class communities are identified as significant variables influencing participants’ level of consciousness and subsequent agency in this area. The second part examines the level of connectivity between participants’ ‘naming’ of the inhibitive forces on teacher-parent relations and their motivation to democratise and radicalise this relationship dynamic. The chapter concludes with an examination of participant awareness of the influence their middle class habitus has on their willingness and capacity to develop a dialectical partnership with parents that is focused on not only ‘naming the world’, but also has a dimension of action that is based upon an appreciation of the dialectical relationship between human beings and their concrete historical and cultural reality. In this way all partners in this process are imbued with a belief in their capacity to change their own situations, a transformation that manifests itself in the democratisation of the teacher-parent relationship. A primary objective of this analysis is to not only uncover ‘limit situations’ that inhibit such a realisation, but also to illuminate pockets of resistance to these constraining influences and the factors that can aid its development.

## 8.2 Awareness of the Influence of Hierarchical Power Structures on the Teacher-Parent Relationship

This section attempts to foreground the issue of power relations, and in particular the vertical power relations between teachers and working class parents that can have a stifling effect on attempts to democratise this relationship dynamic. Divided into two parts, this section commences with an initial exploration of the level of awareness among participants of the propensity of these unequal power structures to place parents in a position of subservience to teachers. Without such awareness, teachers' capacity and willingness to engage with parents in a sense of partnership and solidarity is severely compromised. The second part of this section looks at the detrimental effects the maintenance of these unequal power relations have on the level and quality of teacher engagement with parents. The role habitus plays, and more specifically the level of prior participant experience of engaging with working class communities plays in moulding this habitus is identified as a significant factor in promoting a heightened awareness of the need to challenge the negative influence of the illogical, incoherent but highly influential ideology of 'deficit theory' (Tormey, 2003). The stifling influence 'deficit theory' has on teachers' ability to collaborate with parents is also foregrounded. Crucially it is the nature of this relationship, and the desire to base it on an "unshakable solidarity" (Freire, 1996, p. 110) borne out of a vision of transformation that is not *for* the people but *by* the people, that is of primary interest.

**Table 8: Participants who were Aware of Factors Inhibiting Parental Contact across DEIS Bands**

	No. of Participants
DEIS 1 N=13	8/13
DEIS 2 N=5	2/5

Analysis shows that 10/18 of participants (Fiona, Marta, Moira, Donna, Ciara, Claire, Ryan, Grace, Sarah and Anna) demonstrate awareness of the power factors that impinge on some working class parents’ reluctance to engage with teachers and the formal school environment. Awareness of the influence parents’ own negative childhood experiences of school exerts on their willingness and capacity to engage with their children’s teacher is demonstrated by this cohort. While the findings show greater awareness of these hierarchical power structures and their effects amongst DEIS 1 participants (see Table 8), and amongst those that have engaged with postgraduate studies at either diploma/masters level;<sup>41</sup> the most significant factor identified as central to the level and quality of engagement with such a critically reflective process is the level of pre-service interaction participants had with working class communities (see Table 9). This influence is reflected in the fact that 6/9 of the ‘Working Class-Close

<sup>41</sup> Participant engagement in postgraduate studies at diploma/masters level was identified as a significant promoter of awareness of the influence of power on the level and depth of parent interaction with teachers, with 3/4 of this cohort demonstrating such awareness in comparison to 7/14 of those without this level of professional development.

Proximity' cohort (and 3/3 of the 'Working Class' cohort) demonstrate awareness of these factors to a greater degree than the 'Middle Class' cohort (4/9). A striking feature of the 'Working Class-Close Proximity' cohort's reflections on the topic is their capacity to not only demonstrate awareness of the negative influence teachers' unchallenged assumptions concerning working class parents can have on teacher-parent relations, but their parallel awareness of how they can use these reflections to help develop a culture of partnership and collaboration with parents.

**Table 9: Participants' Social Class/Background and Awareness of Factors Inhibiting Parental Contact**

Social Class/Background	No. of Participants
<b>Working Class-Close Proximity</b> N=9	6/9
(Close Proximity) N=6	(3/6)
(Working Class) N=3	(3/3)
<b>Middle Class</b> N=9	4/9



Parents' negative childhood experiences of school are identified by this cohort as the primary source of their reluctance to engage with their children's teachers<sup>42</sup> Sarah believes that this residual negativity towards the school as an institution is manifested in parents' 'fear' of the school setting, with Sarah stating "that parents are afraid to come in because their experience in school might not have been great I think they feel maybe somewhat embarrassed talking to the teacher" (Sarah 151) Claire, who grew up in the local community she teaches in, believes that her knowledge of the local area affords her a greater insight into the causes of parent disengagement, a view shared by other participants from working class backgrounds (Moir, Grace and Ciara) Sections of the parent population feeling "intimidated by teachers" (Claire 71), and considering "teachers as the enemy nearly as they did when they were kids" (Claire 77), is identified by Claire as a significant obstacle that must be negotiated by teachers wishing to engage with working class parents Working class parents perceived absence of education, power and relevant resources to challenge the school's definition of the self (Reay 1998, Walkerdine & Lucey 1989, Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody 2001) is also highlighted by Fiona, Grace and Frank as being a significant constraining influence

As well as breeding anger, this sense of fear described by Sarah can also engender a more reticent response from parents Awareness of the tendency of some parents to assume a position of subservience in relation to authority figures such as teachers, is

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<sup>42</sup> Despite displaying an awareness of the harmful effects of hierarchical power structures on parent engagement with teachers and the formal school environment, this awareness does not prevent 4/7 participants (Donna, Fiona, Marta and Claire) from also expressing their comfort with the observance of these structures through their maintenance of a measure of professional distance from parents

apparent in Grace and Fiona's recognition of parents adopting "timid" (Grace 80) and "apologetic" (Fiona 117) dispositions when talking with them. The propensity of some working class parents to "put a teacher on a pedestal" (Donna 55) ties in with Kozol's (2007) observations on the Chicago public school system of the late 1960s, where he observed how parents

looked upon these schools as places of remembered misery and failure and prolonged years of humiliation. So, even at the age of 28 or 35, they were still uncomfortable in coming to a school and were also insecure about their capability for speaking cogently to teachers (Kozol, 2007, p. 23).

This level of insecurity is referenced by Bernie as she feels that parents are often reluctant to seek advice from teachers on their parenting concerns as this would involve them admitting that they require assistance, and consequently open themselves up to the potential threat of being reported by teachers to social services for neglect.

### ***8.2.1 Pre Service Experience and its Role in Promoting Teacher Collaboration with Parents***

Awareness of the negative influence that unchallenged assumptions concerning working class parents can have on teachers' capacity to develop a culture of partnership and collaboration with parents is displayed by 7/18 participants (Marta, Ciara, Moira, Claire, Ryan, Grace and Anna). Participant interaction and familiarity with working class communities in their youth appears to play a significant role in helping to account for the fact that 6/7 of this cohort (Ciara, Moira, Claire, Ryan, Grace, and Anna) are either from working class backgrounds, or grew up in close proximity to the working

class communities they now teach in. These findings are consistent with those outlined in Chapter Five, which identify the role that prior experience plays in fostering a positive attitude towards working in the DEIS setting.

While the preceding section outlines participant awareness of the effects of these power differentials that invariably result in working class parents assuming a position of subservience towards teachers,<sup>43</sup> such critical appreciation of the need to deconstruct these hierarchical power structures needs to be superseded by a measure of action that can lead to a more radical relationship dynamic. Claire and Moira's contribution reflects their cognisance of the need for their teacher reflections to be backed up by a dimension of action, with their working class habitus identified as being instrumental in helping them cross the divide between reflection and action and to assume a position of agency. In light of the deficit of emotional support some parents may have in their lives, Claire stresses the need to adopt an "open" (Claire 95) approach. Rather than passively waiting for parents to approach her, Claire advocates a more proactive approach that encourages parents to discuss their problems with her. Claire states "I think especially here, you need to be open and if they have any problems to talk to you because they mightn't have someone to talk to at home" (Claire 95). Moira also views her heightened class consciousness as a medium through which she can initiate a dialogue centred on students' educational development. Moira states "It is not like you're snobby or anything coming talking to them. You're kind of like 'I understand the situation but I'm trying to get him [student] to do this or that'" (Moira 105).

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<sup>43</sup> Freire (1992) believes that this subservience is borne out of the perceived power differential between teachers and working class parents, a product of what Freire believes to be a "'connivance' of the oppressed with the oppressors" (p. 11).

Another demonstration of this cohort's commitment to a change agenda is their opposition to the middle class assumption that working class communities are apathetic towards their local school. Five out of seven of this cohort (Grace, Ryan, Marta, Ciara and Anna) commend the level of parental involvement in their respective schools and challenge the perception that parents from working class communities are disengaged from school and not willing to become involved in school activities, a view that Grace finds reprehensible. Grace states "There might be this notion that disadvantaged people are you know 'oh God, the school and here's the school and here is us and we stay away' It is not really like that at all" (Grace 16 & 17). Grace cites parents' "generosity" (Grace 215) when contributing to school fundraising initiatives as evidence of the positive role they play in the life of her school. Grace states "people in the area, the local people will be really generous with things like [supporting school fundraiser] and you would be surprised" (Grace 215). The strong commitment that parents have to school fundraising and the altruistic image it projects of them challenges the class biased characterisation of working class parents by middle class teachers as being apathetic towards education (the strength of this 'class biased characterisation' is reflected in the expression of 'surprise' noted by Grace). The importance of appreciating the joint responsibility of the teacher and the parent in helping to create an authentic partnership in which all participants grow, is affirmed by Ciara, Marta and Ryan whose contributions sum up the reciprocity in this relationship dynamic. Ryan for example praises the greater parent body for their appreciation of teachers' commitment to their jobs "the one thing that I like about the area is that we always get recognition for the extra time that we give above and beyond" (Ryan 144). Affording parents the courtesy

of her time and taking the opportunity to highlight their child's positive progress is identified by Marta as a way of showing parents the same level of respect, with Marta stating "I try to bring them in and they really appreciate that when they are brought into the class and like I have their stuff to show them if I need to talk to them" (Marta 137) Ciara and Anna continue on this theme and comment on "the great sense of community" (Ciara 138) that exists among the local people Ciara cites the discounts that local businesses give to the school, and Anna highlights the football coaching that parents provide to the school as evidence of this sense of community synergy

This sense of shared ownership amongst the whole school community contrasts with Woods and Jeffrey's (2002) claim that the degree of trust that used to exist in social relations such as between teacher and parent has been significantly diminished, an occurrence exacerbated by the accountability culture that has becoming the increasing standard that governs all professional relationships (Farrelly, 2009) These participants' contributions also serve to contest the perception that working class parents are less supportive of their local schools and supports Kozol's (1991) assertion that "very poor communities place high priority on education" (p 55) <sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Kozol (1991) reports that typically very poor communities in the United States place a high priority on education, so much so, that they often tax themselves at higher tax rates than is the case with the very affluent communities This evidence challenges the victim blaming ideology that is based on class bias and conjecture As Kozol (1991) states "The parents of these children want the same things for their children that the parents in the suburbs want" (p 90)

### ***8.2.2 Teacher Sympathy: Reinforcing Existing Hierarchically Based Power Differentials***

The 'Working Class' cohort's empathy with parents' social circumstances contributes to their motivation to develop more open and inclusive relations with parents. However, the positive implications of this 'reflection-action' synergy comes with a caveat, as the subtle differences between showing empathy towards, and feeling sympathy for, working class parents are key to understanding the limitations that participants' working class habitus can impose on their interpretation of the nature and depth of teacher-parent relations. The following contributions from Ciara and Moira, and their contrasting interpretations of these aforementioned concepts reflects the potential for their habitus to act as a constraining force on the development of their relations with working class parents. Ciara, Moira and Claire identify a capacity to empathise with the challenges faced by working class parents as an advantage of their own working class habitus. In light of her working class background and her own personal experiences as a child growing up in a house where money was a scarce commodity, Ciara feels she is more sensitive towards parents that are struggling to pay for their children's books. While empathy is identified as a key component in the development of any healthy relationship, a move from an empathetic to a sympathetic disposition towards working class parents is problematic. Moira's expression of sympathy for parents that may be experiencing difficulties "I have an awful lot of sympathy really, it is the real feeling because I suppose they grew up in rough times or they have difficulties, whatever they are if there is substance abuse or mental health [issues] or different things" (Moira 88) is problematic as it places the 'recipient' of this sympathy (i.e. working class

parents) in a position of subservience, thus promoting dependency upon the ‘generosity’ or charity (Freire, 1996, p 26)<sup>45</sup> of the establishment (personified in this case by the teacher), a relationship dynamic that ultimately serves to reinforce existing hierarchically based power differentials<sup>46</sup>

In summary these findings point to the role pre-service engagement with working class communities can play in promoting a more positive disposition towards the role working class parents currently play in schools. The ‘Working Class-Close Proximity’ cohort demonstrates not only awareness but also willingness to initiate a process of partnership. The next section will examine the parameters of the teacher-parent relationship and the level of opportunity presented to parents to affect the direction of this partnership, a prerequisite for engagement in a process of co-conscientisation.

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<sup>45</sup> As presented within the parameters of a ‘donor-recipient’ construct, Freire (1996) argues that such ‘generosity’ is false as it is nourished by an unjust social order and is the reason why “the dispensers of false generosity become desperate at the slightest threat to its source” (p 26)

<sup>46</sup> Moira’s sympathetic disposition towards the challenges faced by some working class parents is contradicted by her expression of anger towards parents for having children when she feels they are not capable of adequately providing for them, Moira states “why did you have kids if you can’t give them what you need” (Moira 88)

### 8.3 A Minimalist Approach to Parental Relations

Critical awareness of the need to deconstruct hierarchical power structures that have traditionally placed parents in a position of subservience to teachers is presented as a necessary factor in creating a teacher-parent relationship that for the purposes of this study is defined by its ‘co-intentionality’ (Freire, 1996, p 51) Freire’s (1996) concept of ‘co-intentionality’ positions teachers and parents as subjects co-intent on reality, “not only in the task of re-creating knowledge, and thereby come to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge” (p 51) <sup>47</sup> Freire (1996) however considers this ‘naming’ of the world to be empty “verbalism” in the absence of its dimension of action, an action that leads to the democratisation of teacher-parent relations that is imbued with the dynamics of ‘co-intentionality’ This section examines the level of connectedness between the ‘naming’ of these constraining influences on teacher-parent relations, and participants’ motivation to democratise this relationship dynamic

The section commences with an overview of participant engagement with parents Identifying the professional, institutional and personal factors that contribute to the majority of participants adopting a minimalist approach to parent relations is of primary concern School cultures, differentiated levels of responsiveness to parents according to their social class, and the propensity for teaching experience to play a part in participants becoming more entrenched in this defensive mode are just some of the factors identified as contributing to the pervasiveness of participant disengagement from working class parents In line with the study’s emancipatory focus, this section also

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<sup>47</sup> Freire frames the concept of ‘co-intentionality’ within the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship



illuminates participants' active resistance to this minimalist approach. Pre-service engagement with working class communities is found to have a positive influence on participants' willingness to engage in a more open and inclusive relationship with parents in designated disadvantaged schools.

### ***8.3.1 Positive Perception of Limited Parental Contact***

Ten of the eighteen participants (Fiona, Bernie, Marta, Donna, Linda, Hannah, Claire, Frank, Conor and Sarah) express a positive attitude towards limited parental involvement in the life of designated disadvantaged schools. Adopting a defensive stance in order to protect themselves from parents as expressed by Claire "coming up knocking on your door saying 'why haven't you done this or this?'" (Claire 194) and "try[ing] to distance themselves" (Linda 148) is an approach strongly supported by this cohort of participants. While 2/10 (Linda and Claire) are more circumspect in explicitly welcoming such a restrained approach to parental relations, 5/10 (Frank, Fiona, Bernie, Hannah and Marta) freely admit that they welcome limited interaction with parents, epitomised by Hannah's following contribution "would I like to see more of the parents, no thanks, no you're alright" (Hannah 171). Feeling they are fortunate not to experience the intensity of parental scrutiny that their teaching friends working in middle class schools receive, 3/10 (Fiona, Marta and Ryan) regard their dealings with parents in DEIS schools to be "easier" and "more relaxed" (Marta 71). Marta's comments are reflective of the less pressurised environment these participants experience, one that they feel contrasts sharply with the intensity of pressure that they believe defines teaching in middle class schools. It is clear from these findings that

participants are concerned about the increased capacity of middle class parents to exert pressure on teachers in light of their greater accumulation of cultural capital embodied in the possession of the knowledge, skills and contacts to maintain their advantage through their resource provisions (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe 1995, Hannan, Smyth, McCullagh, O’Leary, & McMahon 1996, Lareau 1999, O’Brien, 2009) Consequently the increasing pressure on teachers to justify their judgments and actions (Troman, 2008) makes teachers more responsive to demands from middle class parents and external judgment (Apple, 2004) This awareness of such heightened pressure also has detrimental consequences for teacher-parent relations in designated disadvantaged schools, as teachers are reluctant to develop more open relationships with parents in order to avoid potentially exposing themselves to similar pressure levels

### ***8.3.2 The Influence of School Culture on Parent Relations***

Although there are no significant differences across the DEIS settings, the findings in relation to the two DEIS 1 schools’ commitment to minimalist relations with parents reveal interesting contrasts (see Table 10) The Limefield cohort’s relatively low levels of commitment to the pursuit of ‘liberating pedagogies’<sup>48</sup> indicates a heightened commitment to an ‘ideology of control’ that is defined by student passivity and the imposition of the teacher’s own experience on the student (Shor & Freire, 1987) This authoritarian pedagogy with its strict adherence to culturally imposed lines of demarcation between teacher and student mirror the interpretation of their role vis-à-vis parents, a relationship perceived to be defined by its static and “in-animate” (Freire,

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<sup>48</sup> The school cohort with the lowest proportion of its participants expressing ‘good to strong’ commitment to ‘liberating pedagogies’(3/7) is Limefield

1996, p. 41) character.<sup>49</sup> In contrast the Millplace cohort's heightened 'awareness of the influence of hierarchical power structures on the teacher-parent relationship',<sup>50</sup> coupled with their relatively low commitment to a minimalist approach, is consistent with an open and inclusive disposition towards parents.

**Table10: Participants' Preference for Minimalist Relations with Parents across School Sites**

School	No. of Participants
<b>Limefield</b> N=7	5/7
<b>Millplace</b> N=6	2/6
<b>Tupper</b> N=5	3/5

### **8.3.2.1 Millplace: Encouraging Greater Parental Participation**

While there is evidence to support the categorisation of the Millplace cohort as one committed to cultivating the development of positive relations with parents, it is the boundaries of these relations that are of particular interest at this juncture. Building on their awareness of factors inhibiting parents from engaging more with the formal school system, Frances emphasises the importance of making the school setting a power neutral

<sup>49</sup> While discussing the necessity for control among the oppressors, Freire (1996, p. 41) describes how this desire for control changes the oppressed into inanimate "things".

<sup>50</sup> The school cohort with the greatest proportion of its participants (4/6) demonstrating 'awareness of the influence of hierarchical power structures on the teacher-parent relationship' is Millplace.

environment in which parents can freely and safely engage with teachers. The emphasis on developing ‘non-threatening’ partnership projects reflects the Millplace cohort’s concerted attempts to build a more collaborative relationship with parents, Frances states

Yea just getting them in even to see that it is not a scary place, and then different things like say we had the jumble sale on last week things that are maybe non threatening, that are conducted in a fun, relaxed atmosphere, that definitely helps (Frances 125)

The development of links with local clubs is another example cited by Frances as being instrumental in fostering and consolidating such strong community links. Their strong commitment to providing extra curricular activities for their students is also indicative of this communitarianism that imbues the professional practice of the Millplace cohort.<sup>51</sup> Both Grace and Frances identify the role of the HSCL Coordinator<sup>52</sup> as being central to changing parents’ perceptions of their local school through her promotion of projects that encourage parents to participate more actively in the life of the school. Grace states

Definitely here [the] home school liaison [coordinator] does a brilliant job like she would have parents in for all sorts, doing ‘Maths for Fun’ [activity based mathematics programme], running the library we had a tuck shop on Friday night and the parents did that themselves for us (Grace 17)

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<sup>51</sup> A high proportion of the Millplace (5/6) and Tupper (4/5) cohorts express their commitment to providing extra curricular activities to their respective students, with lower levels of commitment reported among the Limefield cohort, with 3/7 involved in the provision of such activities (see Chapter Six, Section 6.2.2.2)

<sup>52</sup> Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) coordinators are teachers who are released from all teaching duties and engage in full-time liaison work between the home, school, and the community (Government of Ireland, 2007a)

Engaging in regular, informal communication with parents is also identified by Claire as being representative of this openness with parents, an approach that she feels contrasts sharply with the formality that characterises relations with parents in other schools. Claire states “I know a lot of schools would be like make an appointment, make an appointment Like you would often have parents come to the door and you would give them a couple of minutes” (Claire 79 & 80). While the successful efforts made by the Millplace cohort to encourage greater parent participation is to be commended, it is one that is primarily based around engagement in politically ‘neutral’ topics/activities. In order to build on efforts already made by the Millplace cohort, there is a need to widen the scope of the parent-teacher relationship from one that is primarily based around engagement in politically ‘neutral’ topics/activities to one that also encompasses opportunities for parents to affect the direction of the relationship.

#### ***8.3.2.2 Limefield: Limited Parental Engagement***

Relative to the other school cohorts, the Limefield participants were particularly comfortable with the idea of having limited engagement with parents. This section looks at the influence these views exert on their professional relationships with parents. These actions mainly revolve around the participants projecting a more personable and approachable persona to parents. This ‘softening’ of their image manifests itself in Fiona, Donna and Frances’ attempts to be “personable” and “real” (Fiona 118), “relaxed”, “approachable” and “normal” (Donna 53), and “non-threatening” (Frances 125). Fiona associates being ‘real’ with approachability and in this way attempts to remove the veil of professionalism that closets teachers from potential interaction with

parents, Fiona states “if there isn’t an issue, you know, I’m just there to chat to them and talk to them and they just know from me that they can come and talk to me” (Fiona 121) Her desire to remove inhibiting professional boundaries that impose limits on teachers’ relationship with parents is embodied in her expressed hope that parents will not feel that interaction is limited to the resolution of ‘issues’ invariably related to discipline matters. However despite the conscious efforts she has made to widen the scope of her relationship with parents, she is also anxious that her approachability does not compromise her professional status, Fiona states

I think they still get the impression from me that I’m a professional and you know I would conduct things professionally enough with them. If I had to speak to them, I would organise a time to talk to them. I wouldn’t talk to them at the door, I would say to them can you come back to me at a certain time. So I think they still get the professionalism from me (Fiona 121)

Consistent with her heightened class consciousness which she attributes to her working class background, Moira recognises the importance of talking ‘with’ rather than ‘down’ to parents. Moira states “I suppose like talk with them [parents] instead of talking down” (Moira 89). Despite also talking about portraying herself as being “on the same kind of team as them” (Moira 88), Moira’s engagement in transformative practice is challenging for her and expressed when she qualifies her preceding statement with the following clarification “I have always tried to be on the same kind of team as them even if they make that difficult at times” (Moira 88)

The contradictions evident in Fiona and Moira's contributions also resonate through other participants' stories, a pattern that is indicative of their struggle to break away from the constraining influence of their personal and professional habitus. The propensity of habitus to determine people's likes and interests and inversely engender a dislike towards other behaviours that are not part of one's "sense of one's place" (Bourdieu, 1984), lies at the root of this struggle. This bind is illuminated in Linda's contribution. Linda's efforts "to be down to earth" (Linda 181) manifest themselves in her use of more accessible language in her communications with parents. While this modification of her language could be interpreted as an attempt to recognise the legitimacy of working class parents' linguistic capital, alternatively it also could be perceived as symptomatic of the pervasive influence of her middle class habitus that reinforces the linguistic superiority of the middle classes. There is a suspicion that Linda's efforts could be superficial, an accusation that could also be directed towards Leona who sees the removal of formalities (she refers to herself as 'Miss L') as helpful in breaking down the perception of teachers as being inaccessible and aloof, which allows Leona to communicate with parents on an equal footing. Leona states "I know people would be saying 'oh that is not very professional' but you are kind of at their level you know I prefer it like that" (Leona 104).

Despite these contradictions that are a consistent feature of this cohort's contributions, there appears to be shared clarity amongst this cohort about the need to change the focus of their interactions with parents away from discussions of a professional nature and to concentrate more on striking up an amenable, non threatening

relationship. While projecting an open, approachable image to parents is necessary in order to encourage greater participation, this ‘opening up’ process needs to be backed up by a commitment to true communication. A responsiveness to what Freire (1996) describes as “the essence of consciousness” (p. 60), namely ‘intentionality’<sup>53</sup> which rejects ‘communiqués’ (embodied in participants’ attempts to be ‘real’) and moves towards the establishment of communication between equal partners lies at the heart of authentic communication.

### ***8.3.2.3 Tupper: Heightened Responsiveness to Middle Class Parents***

By virtue of its classification as a DEIS 2 school, Tupper has a socially diverse population and thus provides a crystallising insight into how parents’ social class can influence teachers’ level and intensity of response to parental concerns. Frank and Sarah explicitly refer to experiencing few problems with the parents of the ‘DEIS children’ (working class parents) but finding the ‘other’ parents (middle class parents) more challenging to deal with due to their increased interactions with this cohort of parents on issues pertaining to students’ academic progression. Frank states “Well generally the problems you have with parents are not with the parents of the DEIS children, it’s the parents of the others. You would see very little of the parents of the DEIS children” (Frank 152). Perhaps Tupper’s socially diverse student population contributes to her heightened ‘class consciousness’, but it is significant that Sarah is one of the few participants who explicitly refers to ‘social class’ whilst describing the differences between her interactions with working class and middle class parents. The low levels of

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<sup>53</sup> ‘Intentionality’ embodies the defining characteristic of consciousness. Consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world (Freire, 1996, p. 60).



interaction Sarah has with “the working class and maybe the poverty stricken parents” (Sarah 152) contrasts sharply with the greater frequency and intensity that demarks her interactions with parents ‘with far more money’, a group whom she considers to be ‘very much into their education’ Sarah states

I know last year in particular I have three parents that are very much into the education of the child and they would have been ‘What did they get in their test this week? What did they do this week? Is there any chance they can get extra spellings and more homework?’ (Sarah 168)

While not explicitly stated, the tone of Sarah’s contribution hints at a preference for the less pressurised, minimalist relationship she has with the working class parents, a relationship she feels is free of scrutiny on issues pertaining to students’ academic performance

The Tupper cohort displays a heightened level of responsiveness to middle class parents concerns in light of what they perceive to be their greater capacity to influence the running of the school This level of attentiveness to ‘client’ demand displayed by the Tupper participants reflects the influence of the marketisation of education and teachers’ sensitivity to this growth pattern It is also indicative of the influence of their middle class habitus that by its very essence of social orientation predisposes them towards increased awareness and consciousness of parents with similar social class backgrounds, which has the parallel effect of distancing them from lower socio-economic groups (Bourdieu, 1984) and by effect rendering them less responsive to their needs

Although more intensely felt in Tupper, the propensity for ‘class consciousness’ to orientate participants towards a minimalist approach to parent relations is also observed in the contributions of Bernie (Limefield) and Hannah (Millplace). An analysis of Bernie and Hannah’s narratives highlights the central role the influence of discourses at an institutional level play in helping to reinforce a defensive orientation towards parental engagement. Bernie and Hannah’s decision to seek employment in the designated disadvantaged setting was predicated on a preference for working with working class parents.<sup>54</sup> They reach this conclusion based on a comparison between the experiences of working with parents in DEIS schools with those experienced by them in other teaching practice placements in middle class schools. Feeling that their performance would not be scrutinised by parents to the same degree in the DEIS setting seems to have played a prominent role in them choosing to commence their teaching careers in the DEIS setting. Their stated preference for minimal contact with parents is consistent with this rationale and is indicative of the solidity of these views in light of their experiences as qualified professionals. In light of the now widespread acceptance that teacher identity formation is a socially negotiated process (Reeves, 2009, Goldstein, 2003, Harklau, 2000, Johnson, 2006, Toohey, 2000, Watson, 2006), the influence of discourses at an institutional level appears to reinforce this defensive orientation, one that acts as a serious obstacle to the creation of a more open, inclusive relationship dynamic between teacher and parent.

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<sup>54</sup> See Chapter 5, Section 5.3.4.1 for more details in relation to Bernie and Hannah’s pre-service preference for working in a designated disadvantaged school.

### ***8.3.3 Parental Contact Limited to Issues concerning Student Discipline***

In the absence of parental pressure in relation to their children's academic progression, Marta, Linda, Hannah, Frances and Sarah feel that parental pressure is limited to disciplinary issues, as explained by Linda

You know the contact and the communication, they probably try to distance themselves, but no one has ever come up and accosted me and questioned me about what's going on in the classroom. You might have parents who are concerned, you know, 'Tom hit whoever in the class or in the yard, I am really worried, would you have a word', that's the only concern they come in about (Linda 148)

With the findings in relation to classroom management styles pointing to the embedded influence of an 'ideology of control' in both DEIS 1 schools, it is significant that 4/5 (Marta, Linda, Hannah and Frances) of this named cohort are teaching in the DEIS 1 setting. Their identification of discipline as the primary source of parent concern and pressure in their respective schools reflects the pervasiveness of this control ideology that influences not only classroom practice but also teacher-parent relations. Coupled with the number of participants that favour limited parental contact with parents (10/18), this finding highlights the urgent need for teachers to actively seek to change this stifling dynamic by shifting the focus of teacher-parent interaction in designated disadvantaged schools away from matters concerning student discipline (Troman, 2008), and move it towards one that focuses exclusively on children's learning and well being.

#### ***8.3.4 Teaching Experience and its Influence on Teacher Engagement with Parents***

Professional teaching experience is also identified as a significant factor influencing the level and nature of participant interaction with parents. The more experienced cohort (6-9 years teaching experience) were found to be more likely to distance themselves from engaging freely with parents, with 4/6 of its cohort articulating their preference for such an approach compared to 6/12 of the less experienced cohort (3-5 years teaching experience). However, the school with the highest proportion of participants engaging in a minimalist approach to teacher-parent relations, namely Limefield is also the school with the highest proportion of less experienced teachers. While these findings appear to be contradictory, an exploration of the school cultural factors at play in Limefield points to the prevailing influence of a conservative, control focused culture that serves to reinforce the concerns that early career teachers express about their ability to communicate effectively with parents, concerns that pre date their employment in the designated disadvantaged setting.

In line with Irish (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006, O'Diomasagh, 2004, Swan & Leydon, 1996) and international literature (Capel 1998, Jones 2002, Veenman 1984), the findings confirm the fear and concern NQTs express in relation to dealing with parents. Feeling under intense scrutiny from parents in light of their age and relative inexperience is a view strongly articulated by Donna, Bernie, Grace and Conor. Conor states

I think I was very conscious of that the first year or two that I came out, and I found that parents were very judgmental. You found they were genuinely

questioning, what's this guy up to, and is he actually doing a good job (Conor 142)

Grace also addresses the concern about her age and the impact it had on how authoritative and assertive she was perceived to be by parents. These concerns are indicative of those expressed by young female entrants to the profession who feel their age and the fact that they do not have children of their own, undermine their credibility in the eyes of parents (Cattani, 2002). Interestingly, she feels that the 'disadvantaged' setting provided her with a shield from such negative perceptions, as many of her students' parents were of a similar age to herself, and thus not in a position to cast aspersions on her teaching ability. Grace states

Its funny coming back to the disadvantaged thing, I often find that I am about the same age as maybe some of the parents but I suppose if you weren't working in a disadvantaged area, not to totally generalise it, but you know their parents could be a good bit older than you, and maybe they could be saying 'look at this young one like surely she is not capable' (Grace 76 & 77)

Becoming established in their respective schools is identified by Bernie, Hannah and Conor as the primary source of their increased confidence in their dealings with parents. While a greater sense of efficacy in relation to her ability to "explain [ing] things to parents" (Bernie 150) reflects Bernie's acquired technical proficiency in this area, the influence the process of institutional and professional enculturation has on the nature of teachers' relationships with parents merits further examination.

Having initially encouraged parents to interact freely with them, experience has taught Donna, Conor and Linda to create professional distance between themselves and the parent body. Donna's contribution is particularly illuminating, as despite her continued commitment to an open, inclusive approach to parental relations, she acknowledges that such a strategy is "risky because you can be open with people and then they can kind of abuse it" (Donna 59). Being aware of the potential pitfalls associated with engagement in an open, democratic approach to parental relations is deemed necessary by Donna in order to protect herself from calculating parents attempting to take advantage of her age and relative inexperience. Donna states

It's minding yourself so that no one can say anything about you or that no one can get too close and then turn on you. My style of parental interaction can get me [into trouble] maybe it's because I'm young, maybe it's not my style (Donna 59 & 61)

Experience has also taught Conor and Linda about the risks associated with being "too buddy buddy with some parents" (Conor 146). In contrast to Donna, the influence of this professional and institutional enculturation has contributed to Conor and Linda's decision to curtail the nature of their interaction with parents and adopt a more conservative stance, with Linda tracing this process of gradual retrenchment: "You need some common ground a little bit. But yea, you know, I think that line should stay" (Linda 182). Placing such an emphasis on maintaining this level of 'professional distance' brings Kozol's (2007) concern in relation to its capacity to prevent teachers from getting "beyond that circle of the marginally middle class and reaching out to

parents who are less empowered and less trustful of us at the start” (p. 29-30), firmly into focus.

**8.3.5 Teachers’ Social Background and its Influence on Teacher Engagement with Parents**

The level of pre-service engagement of participants with working class communities is found to have a positive influence on their attitudes towards working class parents in their respective schools (see Table 11). The ‘Working Class-Close Proximity’ cohort was found to be less likely to engage in ‘professional distancing’ than their middle class counterparts. The ‘Working Class-Close Proximity’ cohort’s positive disposition towards working class parents is also reflected in their expressed resistance to the perception that working class communities are apathetic towards their local schools.

**Table 11: Participants’ Social Class/Background and Preference for Minimalist Relations with Parents**

Social Class/Background	No. of participants
Working Class-Close Proximity N=9	3/9
Middle Class N=9	7/9

#### 8.4 Attitudes towards Working Class Parents

Early career teachers' ability to recognise that the education system is based primarily on the beliefs and values of the dominant middle classes is considered central in developing their capacity to problematise "unconscious complicity with hegemony" (Boler & Zembylas, 2003), and in the process assist them in 'reaching out' to the "less empowered and less trustful" parents that Kozol (2007, p 29) references. This section assesses the level of participant awareness of the corrosive influence unchallenged assumptions formed in teachers' middle class habitus can have on their capacity to develop a culture of partnership and collaboration with parents, and the effect such awareness has on the development of their sense of social agency. The results of this analysis show that while 4/18 participants demonstrate such awareness, a far greater number of participants (14/18) articulate their belief that parents in designated disadvantaged schools have a deficiency in their capacity to act as appropriate role models for their children. These findings indicate the importance of teachers critically reflecting on the influence of their habitus, a concept that not only provides a lens through which the world is ordered but also crucially in the context of this discussion, has the capacity to engender a dislike towards behaviours that are not part of middle class teachers' "sense of one's place" (Bourdieu, 1984, p 466).



**8.4.1 The Influence of ‘Deficit Theory’ on Participants’ Perceptions of Working Class Parents**

A majority of participants (14/18) to varying degrees held the view that a proportion of parents in designated disadvantaged schools have a deficiency in their parenting skills set, and as a consequence are in need of systemic ‘support’ in order to address this inherent incapacity to parent their children in an appropriate manner (Fiona, Bernie, Marta, Moira, Ciara, Linda, Hannah, Barbara, Claire, Ryan, Grace, Frances, Frank and Leona). Four of this cohort of fourteen is comprised of participants who in the previous section challenged the perception that working class parents are anti-school. This negative perception of the parenting skills of some working class parents is indicative of the influence of ‘deficit theory’ among this cohort of participants, a theory which is based on the premise that lower achievement in schools is due to a problem with the student, and by implication the parents of students.

**Table 12: Participants who Believe in a Theory of Parental Deficiency across DEIS Bands**

	No. of Participants
DEIS 1 N=13	12/13
DEIS 2 N=5	2/5

DEIS 1 participants were found to have particularly entrenched negative attitudes towards working class parents (see Table 12). Twelve out of thirteen DEIS 1 participants expressed criticism of parents' attitude towards their children's education compared to 2/5 of DEIS 2 participants. The pervasiveness of this sentiment among the Millplace cohort is particularly striking with 6/6 of its participants articulating their belief in the negative influence some parents have on their children's education. Permeating teachers' interactions with students and parents alike, the influence of this control ideology is particularly pervasive in the DEIS 1 setting. Their need to instill a sense of discipline into students to compensate for the marked absence of it in the home is a view expressed by 4/18 participants (Barbara, Hannah, Claire and Leona), 3/4 (Barbara, Hannah and Claire) of whom are teaching in Millplace. These findings are also consistent with the Day et al.'s (2006) study that found that teachers working in marginalised communities refer more frequently than colleagues in other settings to a lack of parental support and deteriorating pupil behaviour. The need for teachers to actively seek to change this stifling relationship dynamic by shifting the focus of teacher-parent interaction in designated disadvantaged schools away from matters concerning student discipline (Troman, 2008), and move it towards one that focuses exclusively on children's learning and well being is made apparent in light of these findings.

**Table 13: Level of Teaching Experience and Participants who Believe in a Theory of Parental Deficiency**

<b>Years of Teaching Experience</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>
<b>3-5 Years N=12</b>	10/12
<b>6-9 Years N=6</b>	4/6

As Table 13 illustrates, participants' level of teaching experience is another influencing demographic variable, with the findings showing a higher expression of negative attitudes towards working class parents to be found amongst the less experienced cohort compared to the more experienced cohort. Participants' social class is also identified as a significant influencing factor with a greater proportion of the 'Working Class-Close Proximity' and 'Working Class' cohorts expressing negative attitudes towards some working class parents in comparison to the 'Middle Class' cohort.

Starting with general criticisms and moving towards more specific forms of criticism directed towards parents, the pervasiveness of 'deficit theory' is discussed across the four following areas derived from the data.

1. General criticism of parents' indifferent attitude towards their children's education;
2. Participants asserting the need to instil a strict sense of discipline into students in light of the perceived absence of it in the home;

3 Parents' lack of appreciation for the 'compensatory measures' evoked as part of schools' participation in DEIS initiatives,

4 Parents' abuse of the social welfare system

#### **8.4.1.1 The 'Blame Game'**

The view that a proportion of parents in designated disadvantaged schools have a deficiency in their parenting skills set is expressed by 14/18 participants. General criticism of what they perceive to be some parents' indifference towards their children's education dominates the contributions of 11/14 participants (Fiona, Claire, Bernie, Hannah, Barbara, Moira, Frank, Ciara, Marta, Frances and Linda), with Barbara's following statement reflective of this shared consensus:

You know when you say about making a change. The biggest hurdle you have to cross when making a change is the parents. Our biggest hurdle is definitely the parents' education, the parents' attitude to education. This drives me mad.  
(Barbara 285 & 287)

The proclivity of working class parents to project their own negative experiences of school onto their children is identified by Barbara as a significant inhibitor of academic progression amongst working class students. Barbara states: "if they go into a parent teacher meeting and the attitude is: 'You say 'oh no they are not reading' 'Oh I hated reading myself' [parents]'" (Barbara 286). What characterises many of these accounts is the ease at which they apportion blame to working class parents often without offering any evidence to justify making such judgments. Citing parents' 'lack of interest' (Fiona 115) as the predominant cause of their 'disengagement' from their children's education,

Fiona and Frances' contributions reflect an absence of critical reflection on the possible sources of this perceived indifference<sup>55</sup> Deviating from the decontextualised nature of Fiona and Frances' criticism, Ciara, Marta and Frank provide concrete examples of what they consider to be parental negligence While Ciara feels that some parents are comfortable with their children missing school days, Marta expresses her incredulity at a parent's apathy towards her role in ensuring her child completes her homework Parents using their inhibitions as an excuse to justify an apathetic attitude towards their children's achievements in school is an obvious source of frustration for Frank Frank is unapologetic in the disdain he directs towards parents who failed to take up their child's typed invitation to afternoon tea hosted in their school, an activity that should be noted is quite removed from the habitus of the working classes Frank states

You would feel that they should feel they owe a duty to the child and if the child is going home, with an invitation that they typed on the computer inviting them to afternoon tea or whatever well I would feel that they shouldn't let their own inhibitions Like if you have a seven or eight year old coming to you with an invitation that they typed up for you, you should be willing to move mountains to get there (Frank 161)

While the level of frustration expressed by these participants is indicative of professionals that passionately care about their students' welfare, there is a need to position these expositions of criticism within a framework of action that recognises the

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<sup>55</sup> Frances' admission that such behaviour is reserved for a small minority of her parents reflects her largely positive attitude towards her students' parents and the supportive role they play in their children's lives Frances states "Now, in fairness most of the parents are very supportive and when you do give them ideas or strategies Most of them want the best for their child, they will try it" (Frances 110)

possibilities that their professional position affords them to ‘make a difference’ by challenging the deterministic nature of this cycle of blame

There appears to be a heightened level of frustration amongst DEIS 1 participants (Bernie, Moira and Hannah) in relation to what Bernie terms “the vicious cycle” (Bernie 111) of disadvantage and its perceived impenetrability. Believing that the rise in teenage mothers is indicative of its increasing prevalence, Bernie states “It’s a vicious cycle and like we also have some very young mums here. I think I have one or two mums who were under sixteen when they had them and so now mum is only twenty, twenty one and really it is a cycle” (Bernie 111). Bernie’s contribution is not only reflective of an inaccurate belief concerning the proportion of teenage pregnancies in Ireland, it is also reflective of a prejudiced assumption that it is a working class norm. More ardent criticism of what is perceived to be the irresponsibility of parents for having children when they are incapable of caring appropriately for them is expressed by Moira and Hannah. Moira states “Sometimes I get angry because why did you have kids if you can’t give them what you need” (Moira 88). Hannah expresses her frustration towards parents’ negligence by framing her criticism in the context of her care responsibilities. Hannah states

A huge thing that I really get upset over is neglect, and I can see there is such neglect out there. You know, some of these people shouldn’t even have children and shouldn’t be allowed to keep these children, and you’re banging your head off a brick wall trying to get anything done (Hannah 141)

While this frustration reflects Hannah's commitment to providing social and emotional support to her students, it is also indicative of her belief that much of her own personal efforts as well as compensatory measures in place at an institutional level are not only ineffective but ultimately futile. It illuminates the extent to which she is wedded to a sense of fatalism in relation to her ability to effect change as she sees it as an individualised choice made by parents to not bother about their children rather than reflect upon the challenges that parents face in light of poverty and their lack of cultural capital. Hannah states

The way I look at it, you can put all the resources in the world into these children. The children in our school pay for nothing but it's the mindset of the parents that needs to change you know and it never is going to. I just really feel that it's a vicious circle and I'm teaching kids now and I can see kids that I taught having babies at such a young age now and I know I'll be teaching their kids in a few years. (Hannah 90)

Her claim "it's the mindset of the parents that needs to change" (Hannah 90) not only clearly demonstrates this ideological determinism but her fatalistic pronouncement that "it [parental attitude] never is going to" (Hannah 90) reflects a deeply pessimistic summation of the causes of student disengagement from formal education.

These contributions as a whole demonstrate the permeability of 'victim blaming' among this cohort, a dynamic that "justifies [mg] inequality by finding defects in the victims of inequality" (Ryan, 1971, p. xii). As evident in Hannah and Moira's dismay at parents having children when they are incapable or unwilling to care adequately for

them, these participants participate in this process of blame apportionment by expressing social abhorrence at the unnaturalness of parents whom they perceive to care little for their children. This singling out process is identified by Derman-Sparks (2002) as a critical part of the process of victim blaming (Kozol, 2007, Ryan 1971). Ryan (1971) believes the brilliance of the ideology is reflected in its capacity to “justify a perverse form of social action designed to change, not society, as one might expect, but rather society’s victim” (p. 8), the influence of which is demonstrated in the ease in which Hannah accepts the impenetrability of ‘the vicious cycle’ and abdicates herself and her school and the social and educational systems from any responsibility in addressing the circumstances that has caused this chasm between certain working class parents and her school. The embedded nature of this constraining ideological influence, allied with the commitment of 8/18 participants to a fixed ability thesis highlights the limiting effect that essentialist beliefs have on teachers’ ability and willingness to challenge the fatalistic attitude towards ‘disadvantage’ that the deficit discourse espouses.

#### ***8.4.1.2 Asserting the Importance of Discipline in light of the Perceived Absence of it in the Home***

Instilling in their students a sense of discipline in order to compensate for the marked absence of it in the home, is a concern expressed by 4/14 participants (Barbara, Claire, Hannah and Leona). It is also significant that 3/4 of these participants are members of the ‘Working Class-Close Proximity’ cohort, a cohort that has a relatively high proportion of its participants recorded as expressing a negative disposition towards the quality of working class parenting. The perception that teachers need to act as



appropriate role models for their students, in light of the paucity of support offered by their parents is stressed by this cohort. The importance of acting as a positive role model in terms of discipline for students because “they [students] might not have the best role models at home” (Hannah 56), is a striking feature of the ‘Working Class-Close Proximity’ cohort’s contributions, a need that Hannah, Barbara and Leona believe is intensified in disadvantaged areas. Hannah and Barbara state

In our school teachers have to be role models, well in every school, but especially in a disadvantaged area (Hannah 56)

They think I am very strict because I think in a disadvantaged school you do have to have that discipline because it is something that they don’t have at home (Barbara 239)

Claire also calls into question parents’ capacity to instill a culture of discipline into their homes, and highlights the detrimental consequences this has for her students. Claire states

Like you would give out to them for cursing and you know at home the same thing is going on. Like they are hearing it, they are talking about watching ‘Geordie Shore’ [television programme appropriate for adult viewing] at eleven o’clock at night, which is totally inappropriate (Claire 65)

The need to compensate for this perceived deficit by ensuring school provides a disciplined, structured environment for students is to the forefront of her considerations, Claire states “It is important, especially here that they see that there is a way that it should be” (Claire 66). These findings concur with recent literature that highlights increasing concerns about school discipline amongst primary teachers working in

schools serving marginalised communities (EDC, 2004, Inspectorate of DES, 2005a) They also indicate the potentially harmful effect of culturally mediated expectations surrounding the teacher's role in compensating for a perceived absence of appropriate role models for children from working-class and marginalised backgrounds (Connolly 1998) Adopting a regulatory function and a punitive role in order to address this perceived discipline deficit (Kitching, 2009) is problematic not only in relation to the creation of a democratic classroom, but also in its capacity to inhibit the development of a sense of 'authentic' partnership between teachers and parents

#### ***8.4.1.3 'Unappreciative' and 'Exploitative' Parents***

Considering some working class parents to be unappreciative of the 'compensatory' measures evoked as part of schools' participation in DEIS initiatives is a view held by 6/14 participants (Bernie, Frances, Hannah, Barbara, Frank and Fiona) This view is particularly prominent among DEIS 1 participants as 5/6 (Frank is the exception) of this cohort teach in this setting This sentiment reflects the influence of liberal egalitarianism that seeks to turn the tables on sections of society that are suffering at the hands of inequality This reversal is achieved by holding them to account for their ungratefulness towards the measures taken by society to address their financial and social 'deficit' An underlying premise of liberal egalitarianism is that there will always be major inequalities and that the role of society is to regulate rather than eradicate them (Baker et al, 2004, Drudy & Lynch, 1993) Such a philosophy is reflected in Bernie's criticism of some parents whom she feels abuse the free books scheme in operation in her school Becoming accustomed to 'free' school activities and resources is also identified by

Bernie, Frances and Barbara as being problematic, with Frances feeling that parents have become “so accustomed to getting so much for free [that] at times it is nearly expected [and] taken for granted” (Frances 135) While Frank and Fiona are more reserved in articulating their disappointment at the level of appreciation they receive from parents for voluntarily providing extra curricular activities for their students, Hannah is more forthright and feels that a sense of entitlement pervades some parents’ attitudes and results in a lack of appreciation for teachers’ efforts, Hannah states

The parents in our school seem to just expect to be given everything for free, they are on the take an awful lot, hand out hand out and not so much appreciation of what is actually being done for them (Hannah 105)

The condemnatory tone of the language used by Hannah, epitomised by her references to parents seeking “hand outs” and being “on the take” (Hannah 105) is also in evidence in Barbara’s comments concerning the negative effect the expectation of free resources can potentially have on children Barbara states “I think that it is fantastic that all these children get all these like extra activities but if you get everything for nothing in life, you expect everything for nothing when you’re older” (Barbara 287) The thesis presented by Barbara on the possible effects on future generations centers around a belief that compensatory measures merely accentuate the divide by spawning a culture of dependence and exploitation, while also affirming the aforementioned liberal egalitarian ideals that center around using equality of opportunity as a mechanism to regulate competition for advantage (Baker et al , 2004)

The debate concerning parents' misappropriation of school resources is elaborated on by Bernie and Barbara (2/14) to include an analysis of what they consider to be the abuse of the social welfare system by some working class parents. Not trusting parents to use their benefits prudently and appropriately is the motivation behind Bernie's proposal to replace the child benefit allowance with a voucher system, while Barbara proposes the amendment of the job seekers benefit in light of its misuse. Barbara states

I'm a primary school teacher, full time     I'm giving grinds during the week and  
I can't afford a holiday in New York. There is something seriously wrong here. I  
think what needs to be addressed for us is the dole. (Barbara 288)

The personalisation<sup>1</sup> of her rationale behind such a proposal embodied in the presentation of her family as one "who have worked for everything in our life" and her reference to being "raised in a way that was like we don't go on the dole" (Barbara 287) highlights the influence of her middle class habitus, one that places a premium on the meritocratic belief that effort and ability will invariably be rewarded with success and social mobility. The belief that she is entitled to benefit from her strong work ethic also echoes Freire's (1996) referencing of the 'deserving rich'. Her claim that parents from working class backgrounds prefer to receive job seekers allowance rather than gain employment (Barbara 287 "sure why would you bother working if you get [it] in your hand?") appears to have its origins in the firm belief she places in meritocracy. Consequently she perceives anyone who fails to adhere to these meritocratic principles that she and her family ascribe to, are therefore responsible for their own plight. While the premium meritocracy places on personal responsibility appears to be fair from a rational

perspective, an examination of 'success' rates along social class demarcations reveals a less than equitable picture (Baker et al , 2004)

## 8.5 Conclusion

The unveiling of opportunities for hope, irrespective of the obstacles that may exist is one of the main tasks of the progressive educator (Freire, 1992) If the progressive educator is to create these opportunities, then an oppressive reality that absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness is one that needs to be challenged and resisted (Freire, 1996, p 33) The projection of this oppressive reality is found not only in the negative representations of working class parents, but also in the 'circles of certainty' (Freire, 1996) that help to create a solidarity amongst teachers that legitimises their position as arbiters of their students' intellectual capacity that they believe is fixed and unmovable It is therefore significant that Hannah and Barbara, the two participants that are most demonstrative in expressing their commitment to a deficit model are teaching in Millplace, a site where the links between deficit thinking and essentialist beliefs concerning students' academic capabilities are particularly pronounced <sup>56</sup> It is also significant that of the 8/18 participants that are committed to an essentialist view of their students' intellectual capabilities, 5/8 (Linda, Hannah, Barbara, Claire and Grace) express a negative disposition towards working class parents'

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<sup>56</sup> The Millplace cohort was found to have the greatest proportion of its participants (6/6) articulating the view that a proportion of parents have a deficiency in their parenting skills set The school with the greatest proportion of participants expressing belief in a 'fixed ability' thesis (4/6) was also found to be Millplace

engagement with their children's education<sup>57</sup> This 'mythicisation' of reality, defined by its irrationality and sectarianism, is in direct opposition "to a critical and dynamic view of the world" that "strives to unveil reality, unmask its mythicisation, and achieve a full realisation of the human task the permanent transformation of reality in favour of the liberation of people" (Freire, 1996, p 83)

In light of the social inequality that pervades society and the propensity for the 'myth-creating irrationality' (Freire, 1996) (that characterises adhesion to deficit models) to help legitimise its acceptance, it is important that teachers explore their own cultural backgrounds honestly in order to overcome their own cultural prejudices and ethnocentrism The challenging of ethnocentrism and its influence on teaching beliefs, styles, and interactions with children (Bourdieu, 1984), should not be a solitary pursuit, rather it should encompass a "serious, correct political analysis" (Freire, 1992, p 9) on hegemony, and its many veiled and enigmatic guises in a process forged *with*, not *for* parents In this way a new found sense of trust and hope can be created in teachers and parents' shared ability to create a new reality that is not perceived "as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform" (Freire, 1996, p 31)

Despite their expressed commitment to deficit models, there are examples of attempts by participants to resist their constraining influence Participant awareness of the power factors that impinge on working class parents' engagement with teachers and

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<sup>57</sup> All five of this cohort work in DEIS 1 schools, 4/5 of whom are Millplace participants (Hannah, Barbara, Claire and Grace)

the formal school environment has already been identified. This awareness is a signifier of agency towards addressing the constraining influence that these power differentials have on teacher-parent relations. While 10/18 participants demonstrate awareness of the effects of these power differentials that invariably result in an attitude of subservience towards the teachers (Freire, 1992), such critical awareness of the need to deconstruct these hierarchical power structures needs to be followed by a measure of action that can lead to a more radical, transformative relationship dynamic that is defined by its 'co-intentionality' (Freire, 1996, p. 51). The 'Working Class-Close Proximity' cohort demonstrates not only awareness, but also a willingness to initiate a process of partnership, but it is a restrictive vision of partnership with the agenda and parameters of the relationship set by the teacher and with minimal opportunity for parents to affect the direction of the dialogue. The entrenchment of views in relation to the negative influence some working class parents have on their children's education amongst both the 'Working Class' and 'Working Class-Close Proximity' cohorts is consistent with their comfort in presenting themselves as positive role models for the working class to emulate. These understandings of 'partnership' lack the 'co-intentional' nature which positions teachers and parents as subjects, co-intent on a reality that presents collaborative opportunities to create and re-create knowledge (Freire, 1996, p. 51). Acting as a 'role model' by definition involves the presentation of him/herself to students and parents as their necessary opposite (Freire, 1996, p. 53). The well intentioned 'donor-recipient' dynamic to the teacher-parent relationship is therefore deemed necessary for the working class to emulate these teachers' 'success' in making the journey of social mobility from working class to middle class status.

## Chapter Nine

### Conclusion

#### 9.1 Introduction

This study is underpinned by a modernist perspective that maintains that social transformation is possible (O'Shea & O'Brien, 2011) and that teachers, schools, and the education system as a whole are capable of performing a powerful emancipatory function when focused on issues of social justice (Freire, 1998). The research is also predicated upon the assumption that the quality of pedagogies is a social justice issue (Lingard & Keddie, 2013), and that relationships are central to how schooling can make a difference to students and society. However, it is also important not to overstate the social justice possibilities for pedagogy and teachers, particularly when located against the continual weakening of social justice policies that characterise not only the global (Lingard & Keddie, 2013), but also the national policy context. If substantive change is to be brought about, the role teachers and schools can play must be accompanied by comparable changes in all education subsystems (curriculum and assessment structures, management structures, organisational structures, teacher education, and at a national policy level), and in the related politico-economic realms (Lynch, 1999). Hayes, Mills, Christie, and Lingard's (2006, p. 178) view that teachers and schools can make *a* difference, but not *all* the difference is a useful way of encapsulating this sentiment.

From within this perspective, the study explored what 'making a difference' meant for early career teachers, in the context of their day-to-day practice as teachers in urban



designated disadvantaged schools “Inequality is a pervasive fact of our world” (Baker et al , 2004, p 3) and the starkness of this truism challenges all involved in education to question how education is helping to create a more equal society As educators working in communities that are experiencing intense social challenge, the participants in this study bear witness on a daily basis to the deeply damaging effects of inequality on the students they teach Explicit and tacit understandings of ‘making a difference’ took on particular significances within this social context

While the study’s phenomenological approach meant that primacy was afforded to giving voice to the lived experiences of early career teachers, this did not preclude me, the researcher, from casting the phenomenological mantle aside at various stages in order to engage with the relevant theoretical, conceptual and policy discourses This was done in order to generate new meanings and understandings of the phenomenon under consideration In this way, a conversation was established between what the critical educator and sociology discourses, equality perspectives, and teacher identity literatures articulated about the possibilities for transformative praxis, and the actions and attitudes that constituted the difference the participants in this research felt they were making

There is little doubt that the critical discourse makes exacting demands on teachers in terms of how they define and articulate their professional role and responsibilities This task is heightened for this study’s participants in terms of the social context they work in Their work in communities that are experiencing inter-generational poverty and social disadvantage, and the intensity of care and attention many of their students

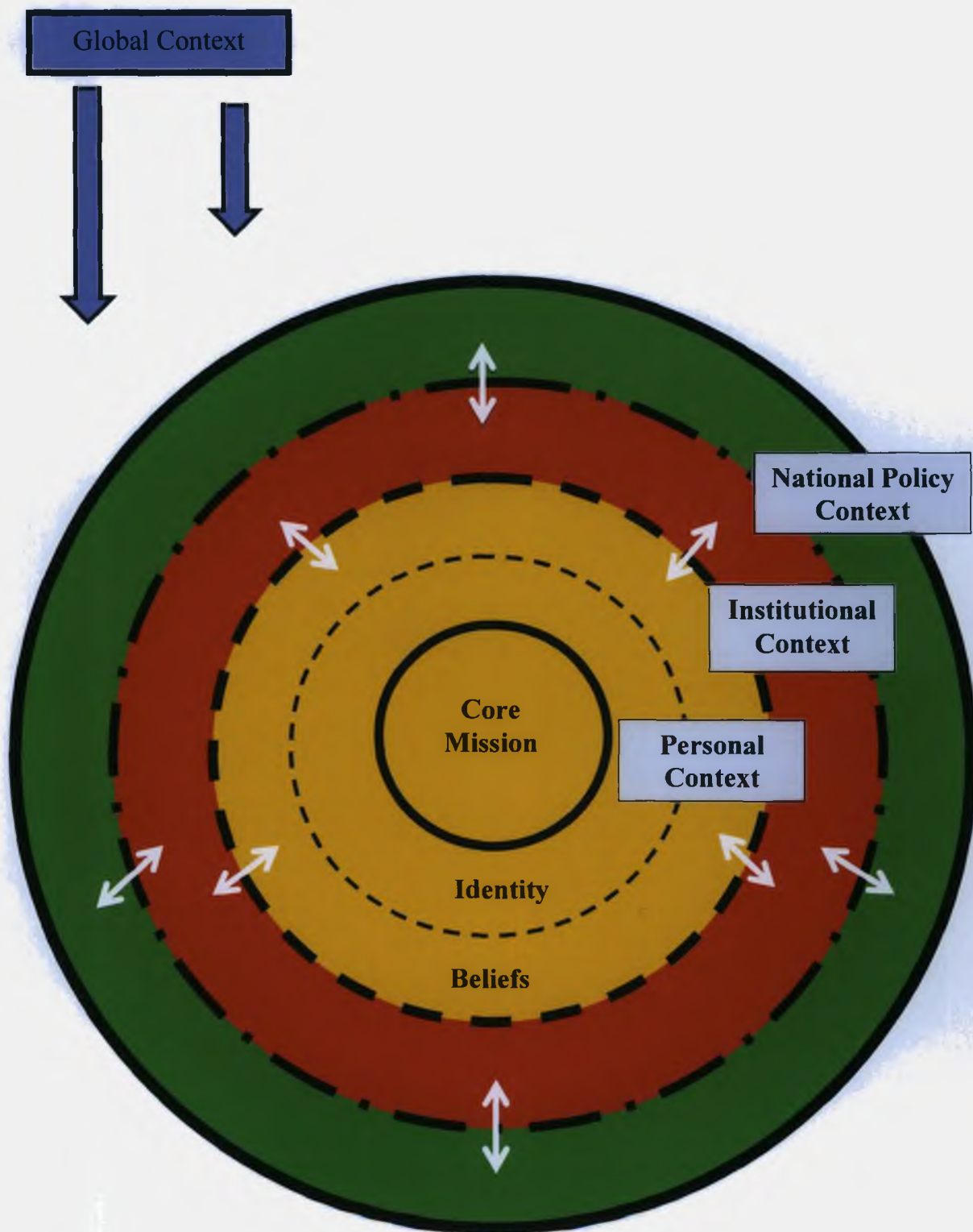
require, places significant demands on them professionally. Ideas around fairness dominated my deliberations around reaching conclusions about the kinds of difference they were making. In particular, as a teacher mentor of NQTs, I was conscious that teachers at the early stages of their careers are particularly vulnerable to being coerced into orienting their practices towards satisfying the exigencies of accountability and performativity. As Figure 4 illustrates, in order to fully understand the possibilities for teacher agency, it was important to examine closely the personal, institutional and policy spheres of influence within which they operate, and the level and nature of engagement participants had with these influences. It is from within these experiential and theoretical understandings that I attempted to reconcile the participants' accounts of their professional lives and practices with the critical discourse and its philosophical ideas about transformative education.

This interrogative process proved to be particularly challenging, and I experienced considerable difficulty reconciling participants' ideas of 'making a difference' and those of transformative praxis and theory. I believe the origins of this difficulty lies in the gap that exists between what the theorists are saying should be happening, and the policy and professional context within which teachers operate. While the intellectual thinking of critical educators such as Freire, Apple, and Kozol are embedded in praxis, and offer real and tangible ways in which educators can begin to engage in transformative praxis, it is also a way of thinking that places the upmost importance on context. Apple (2011) describes the emphasis that he and Freire have placed on the development of critical theoretical resources, which he states "is best done when it is dialectically and intimately

connected to actual movements and struggles” (p 46) While the teaching role is agentic, teachers are also to some extent products of a certain system Therefore, I had to guard against transposing this intellectual inheritance onto the participants’ praxis in a universalist way, as to do so ran the risk of washing out their voices, in just the same way the performativity and efficiency discourses seek to do As the research was situated in ‘the gritty materialities’ (Apple, 2011, p 41) of the participants’ daily lives, a more nuanced and sensitive approach to the analysis and reporting of findings was required However, these concerns had to be held in tension with the study’s emancipatory perspective which was focused on identifying both the positive and negative implications of participants’ practice in order to generate discussion around the role that educators and the education system as a whole can play in the wider project of social justice

This concluding chapter is in four parts In part one, the dominant version of ‘making a difference’ as articulated by the sample of early career teachers as a whole is outlined In part two, structural elements of ‘making a difference’ and how it is variably understood by teachers is deconstructed In part three, supported by evidence from the data, the role ITE can play in initiating and sustaining a process of social and political criticality amongst student teachers is examined In part four, ideas for further research into the political dimension of teaching and teacher development are outlined

**Figure 4: Spheres Of Influence**



## **9.2 What ‘Making a Difference’ Means for Early Career Teachers Working in Designated Disadvantaged Schools**

There were two separate and contradictory views of ‘making a difference’ found to be at work in participants’ understandings of the term. The first view was concerned with working towards sameness in the name of equality and making a difference. In response to academic and policy demands, this view of ‘making a difference’ was characterised by pedagogies of sameness and understandings of equality as sameness. The second view was underpinned by a caring ethic that characterised their educational relationships, and was in tension with these pedagogies and practices of sameness. While the policy discourses of performativity and efficiency seek to frame the teacher-student relationship within instrumental, utilitarian terms (Kelchtermans, 2011), the strength of the cohort’s commitment to a caring moral praxis ensured that they largely resisted these advances.

### ***9.2.1 Policies, Pedagogies and Practices of the Same***

The idea of ‘making sameness’ resonated strongly through participants’ understanding of the difference they were making in the cognitive and academic domain. The majority believed that their students deserved to be treated fairly and the same, and to be given an equal opportunity to compete for social advantages (Rawls, 1971). Influenced by macro-level policy discourses that emphasise performativity and measurable outcomes in schools, and their technologies of surveillance and recognition that regulate them, many participants perceived the development of students’ literacy

and numeracy skills as the most appropriate way of improving their students' chances of success in school and beyond. Consistent with the argument made in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011), many participants believed that if their students failed to grasp basic literacy and numeracy skills, they would be excluded from academic achievement and other forms of learning and self-esteem (Ó Breacháin & O'Toole, 2013). Despite some concerns about the reductive impact that the increased focus on literacy and numeracy attainment has had on the successful implementation of all the facets of the primary curriculum, there was a general consensus that it was an acceptable 'inconvenience' in the interests of the general good. These understandings had the net result of orienting the majority of participants towards teaching to the 'basics' with less innovative and cognitively challenging approaches, a finding that is consistent with a wealth of Irish research into teacher practices in designated disadvantaged schools (Devine 2011, Devine et al, 2013, Lynch & Lodge, 2002, Smyth, 1999, Smyth & Calvert, 2011).

While the outcomes of this new milieu of accountability in primary education remain to be seen (Conway & Murphy, 2013), these findings indicate that there is a real danger that the current focus on literacy and numeracy to the exclusion of other curricular areas is undermining the holistic ethos of the Primary Curriculum (O'Breachain & O'Toole, 2013). Bearing in mind that the data collection process finished prior to the roll out of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011) which has an increased focus on outcomes as measured in standardised tests, it is fair to surmise that the problem of

‘curriculum narrowing’ (Ó Breacháin & O’Toole, 2013) has become further pronounced since its introduction

#### ***9.2.1.1 Uncritical Adhesion to Meritocratic Ideology***

Their belief in meritocracy shaped participants’ understandings of the kind of difference they could make in social justice terms. The majority of participants saw their role as one that was largely concerned with ameliorating the inevitable inequalities and injustices that are an unwelcome fact of life. However, by accepting that inequality of resources is inevitable, the idea of achieving fairness is largely a forlorn hope (Baker et al., 2004). This tacit understanding engendered some doubts amongst a minority of participants about what students from underprivileged backgrounds could achieve academically. Most participants’ uncritical adherence to institutionally embedded discourses of parental deficiency also helped to create a shared understanding that it was at the level of the family where their students were being ‘disadvantaged’

#### ***9.2.1.2 Ambivalence to Difference and Diversity***

The difficulty with a universalist ethic of justice is that the notion of sameness in equality terms, ignores the difference in starting points (Young, 1990). Bourdieu (2008) argues that such a narrow focus “favours the most favoured and disfavors the most unfavoured” (p. 36). The intensity of focus on linguistic and logical mathematical competencies to the exclusion of other intelligences (Gardner, 1983) has a disproportionate impact on working class children. The failure of most participants to recognise and develop all forms of intelligence and human capabilities, and to relate the

curriculum to their students' worlds and legitimise locally produced knowledge (Mills, 2008), demonstrated a tendency to treat all students the same. In this way, many participants unwittingly gave their sanction to inequality in relation to culture (Bourdieu, 2008, p. 36)<sup>58</sup> largely through their failure to recognise and account for initial differences in possession or otherwise of valued cultural and social capital (Lingard & Keddie, 2013).

Another major difficulty with the notion of sameness in equality terms is that it automatically confers a negative value to diversity. Practices and discourses of denial (Fraser, 2000), non-recognition and sameness were especially evident in the way the majority of participants resolved the ethnic diversity 'problem' by adopting an institutionally embedded position of cultural assimilation of diversity. These practices were motivated by participants' desire to promote the moral good and ensure that students from different ethnic backgrounds felt part of the prevailing school culture. However, practices of assimilation contribute to the silencing of the alternative ways students from diverse backgrounds may articulate their identities, and they imply that some individuals or groups are central to structures of power and privilege while others are positioned outside (Sensoy & Di Angelo, 2012).

Despite these tendencies towards sameness participants did engage with and seek to problematise these inequalities of respect and recognition (Baker et al., 2004) but their practices were predominantly concerned with 'celebrating' diversity, and while they

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<sup>58</sup> Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) see this sanctioning process occurring in many cases 'behind the backs' of actors engaged in the school system - teachers, students and their parents, and often against their will.



reflected a positive move along the continuum of recognition, they were not entirely unproblematic. Mirroring the discourse on diversity that is evoked in national social policy documents and curriculum guidelines, participants unconsciously positioned themselves as the ‘valuer’, or ‘celebrator’ of difference (Bryan, 2010). While these positions imply that teachers have the power to confer recognition on the ‘other’ (Bryan, 2010, Kitching, 2010a), it seems unreasonable to be overly critical of these well intentioned practices, especially as they were aligned with best practice as laid out in the curriculum guidelines. Notwithstanding this, the challenges that the cohort as a whole experienced in teaching for diversity and the problematic practices and power inequalities that ensued, signal strongly the need for sustained professional development in this area (Devine, 2011, Devine et al , 2013, OECD, 2009a).

### ***9.2.2 Being a Good Role Model***

Participants’ vision of teaching was also heavily invested in the social and moral formation of their students (Devine et al , 2013). Acting as a positive role model for their students, to look up to and emulate, was the primary way in which participants expressed their commitment to this broader ‘mission’ of education. Here again, notions of ‘making sameness’ strongly underpinned this moral purpose to help students to succeed. There were numerous ways in which participants occupied, and attended to this role. Encouraging students to make good life decisions was one way in which some participants interpreted their role in their students’ moral formation. A desire to influence their students’ social formation is evident in the role some played in modelling appropriate behaviours. This role was expressed in terms of teachers’ modeling of the

skills of negotiation and compromise in order to promote positive relations between students. It also encompassed a more regulatory function in terms of demonstrating and asserting the importance of maintaining discipline and acting 'appropriately'. This position was informed in many cases by an institutionally embedded belief that some working class students suffer from a deficit of appropriate adult role models in the home. While these identity positions are concerned with the propagation of the 'primary good' of education (Rawls, 1971), on an unconscious level such positioning tacitly imposes middle class 'cultural arbitraries' on working class students and parents (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

### ***9.2.3 Retaining the Personal in the Professional through an Ethic of Care***

The ethic of justice that predominantly underpinned the actions of the participants in the academic and social realm is one that was primarily concerned with upholding principles and rights (Sevenhuijsen, 1998, Tronto, 1993). Rationality, individual autonomy and the principles of justice dominated. An ethic of justice also implies that teachers' professionalism and professional duties (rather than responsibilities) are primarily concerned with the technical-rational aspects of teaching, and the development of instrumental 'means-to-an-end' connections with students, that produce results and measurable outcomes (Kelchtermans, 2011). This justice ethic and the technical and structured pedagogies of the same, that they often felt compelled to promote, were at odds with the personal dimension of teaching that they wished to retain in their practices.

Consistent with Farrelly's (2009) research which also focused on teachers who were working in urban, designated disadvantaged schools, participants strongly recognised the fact that teaching is an affective activity and informed by an ethic of care that revolves around another set of moral concepts that govern their duties as a professional educator. Within an ethic of care there is a greater emphasis on responsibilities and relationships rather than on principles and rights (Gilligan, 1982). This is captured and embodied in teachers' strong sense of moral commitment, personal engagement and care that they provided for their students on a daily basis. The teachers in this study saw the promotion of loving, trusting and caring relationships as an important aspect of equality of condition (Baker et al., 2004). Intensified and exacerbated by students' experiences of living in communities that are coping with inter-generational poverty and social disadvantage, the cohort as a whole were very conscious of what they saw as their heightened moral responsibility to attend and respond to the care needs of their students. As workers in what Bourdieu (1998) calls the 'left hand' of the state and the altruistic service and emotional labour that it demands of teachers (Hochschild, 1983), the DEIS 1 cohort in particular assumed the role of quasi social workers (Lingard & Keddie, 2013) as they bore the fallout from the neo-liberal policies espoused by what Bourdieu calls the 'right hand of the state'. Within this caring moral praxis, these teachers saw care and the development of ethical, rather than economic or instrumental relationships (Kelchtermans, 2011), as an inalienable part of their daily practice (Farrelly, 2009).

However, the pervasive influence of a performativity driven policy discourse that promotes functional, utilitarian connections with students, and institutionally negotiated

ethnocentric understandings of teacher as an intellectual role model, have in many cases consigned these affective practices largely to the realm of care rather than infusing their practice as a whole. Despite this, there was evidence of participant resistance to this attempted silencing or marginalisation of the ethical dimension to professional responsibility. The 10/18 participants that were found to have a good to strong commitment to the task of implementing ‘liberating pedagogies’, reflected the enduring influence of their core beliefs through a democratic and inclusive vision of education that eschewed a more individualistic, technical-rational, justice approach. These beliefs were largely articulated in their ambiguous relationship with an ideology of control that has traditionally dominated the space of classroom management in disadvantaged schools. While their status as early career teachers left them “vulnerable to the received institutional wisdom that it is tantamount to personal failure if students cannot be properly controlled” (Sugrue, 1996, p. 165), to varying degrees many participants managed to retain an emphasis on maintaining and nourishing positive, trusting relationships with students. Ambiguity around holistic education similarly reflected the residual influence of these core beliefs, and the messy, non linear relationship they had with their realised practice (Devine et al., 2013, Fives & Buehl, 2011). While they accepted that the intensity of focus on literacy and numeracy has meant that full curriculum coverage is a virtually unattainable ideal, the strength of their involvement in the provision of extra curricular activities reflected their desire to compensate for such a deficiency in their instructional programme. These ambiguous connections also reflect the way in which certain beliefs about justice and care can compete against each other,

and sometimes, act as contradictory discourses which (m) form and, at times, impede pedagogies of sameness and difference

### **9.3 ‘Making a Difference’: A Context, Career Stage and Habitus Specific Idea**

The preceding analysis shows that the difference participants were making in social justice terms was heavily influenced by the way they had to negotiate a multiplicity of value systems regarding what it is to be a ‘good’ teacher, and the often ascribed identity positions that are generated around these discourses (Kitching, 2011) This section draws conclusions around the interaction between the personal, institutional and policy spheres of influence (see Figure 4) that defined the core of participants’ understandings of teacher identity (Day et al , 2006, Furlong & O’Brien, 2010) As illustrated in Figure 1, the ‘interfaces’ between the spheres have permeable membranes allowing a flow of influence from one sphere to another How participants engaged with, and mediated these external spheres of influence determined the difference they made in social justice terms

This section commences with an analysis of the influence that global and national contexts have on social and policy expectations around good, effective and efficient teaching The influence policies of performativity and accountability exerted at an institutional level resulted in participants holding context-specific notions around what was deemed both possible and practical Local conditions such as level of (dis)advantage, the intensity and concentration of students’ needs, and school culture all

impacted upon the way participants engaged with, and/or mediated these neo-liberal policies and ideologies. The influence of the personal sphere is also discussed, with participants' career stage and socio-cultural habitus found to have a significant effect on how participants defined their professional role, responsibilities and identities.

For the purpose of clarity, the influence of context, teacher career-stage and habitus are presented and discussed sequentially, though the conscious intention is to render the analysis cumulative. In this respect, the points of intersection between these varying components and ideas of 'making a difference' and the identity positions that participants have constructed around them, are discussed throughout. In the closing discussion to this section, it is argued that 'making a difference' is best understood as a fluid and relational concept that is capable of evolution and change, as evidenced in the ability of some participants to plot an alternative trajectory to the path of pedagogical certainty followed by the majority.

### *9.3.1 A Context-Specific Idea*

The higher consequences and risks, and erosion of trust in teachers' professional integrity (Lynch, 2006) that has accompanied the 'rising tide of new accountabilities' (Conway & Murphy, 2013), was particularly felt by the DEIS 1 cohort as a whole, and most especially by those with less teaching and life experience. While one would expect that teachers working in the relatively more 'advantaged' DEIS 2 setting to be more responsive to performativity pressure (Devine et al., 2013), the tighter "technologies of surveillance" (a level that is not required in other 'advantaged' schools) (Kitching,

2010a, p. 222) that surround DEIS 1 schools accounts for this apparent anomaly. This felt pressure, and the migration of these concerns in some instances into 'test preparation' confirm anecdotal evidence that many teachers and principals are already interpreting the new accountabilities as high stakes (Conway & Murphy, 2013, Ó Breacháin & O'Toole, 2013). In light of recent government attempts to cut funding to DEIS schools (MacCárthaigh, 2012), it is rational for the schools in this study to interpret the recently imposed mandatory reporting of standardised test scores as particularly high stakes (Diamond & Spillane, 2004), and to be highly responsive to the structured, prescriptive literacy and numeracy programmes that are designed to drive up standards.

This accountability driven professional environment, coupled with the widespread feeling that the tasks and responsibilities of teaching in communities that have experienced severe social inequality were often too great, moved the majority of the DEIS 1 cohort into making 'choices of the necessary' in terms of how they defined their professional responsibilities and boundaries. Heightened by institutional 'pull' factors, they resolved this tension by assuming a compartmentalised professional identity and professional responsibility. The respective value and recognition that was afforded to the carer/professional educator dichotomy at an institutional level determined to a large extent their level of responsiveness to each separate and distinct role.

In contrast, the DEIS 2 cohort was less consumed by, and less attentive to the policy discourses around raising the standard of literacy and numeracy. The greater level of

professional experience found amongst the DEIS 2 cohort was also significant in this regard, as across the three sites the more professionally experienced participants were found to demonstrate a heightened capacity to mediate the constraining effects of these policies on their practice. The DEIS 2 cohort was also less occupied with attending to students' care needs, and felt less disadvantaged by the setting they worked in, in terms of meeting the academic needs of their students. As a consequence, they experienced less pressure to choose between their professional roles, and articulated a more balanced, synthesized professional identity. This allowed them to maintain a greater level of connectedness in their pedagogies with the constructivist, holistic, and child-centred ideals espoused in the Primary Curriculum (Coolahan, 2011, Downes, 2003).

### ***9.3.2 A Career Stage Specific Idea***

The significance of participants' years of teaching experience on teacher practice is especially noteworthy in the findings. There was a greater prevalence of more structured and control oriented pedagogies, as well as assessment-driven approaches to teaching and learning amongst the younger, more professionally inexperienced members of the DEIS 1 cohort (three to five years teaching experience). This finding indicates that concerns surrounding the maintenance of classroom discipline and catering for individual difference, and the reliance on traditional, didactic teaching methodologies that were found to be prevalent amongst Irish primary NQTs in their first year of teaching (Inspectorate of DES, 2005a, 2005b, Killeavy & Murphy, 2006, O'Diomansaigh, 2004), continued to exercise the thoughts of these participants well into the early stage of their careers. Using Huberman's (1989) career stage model as a



reference point, it appears that the younger, less experienced teachers' progression through this developmental framework was somewhat suppressed owing to the demanding social context in which they began their careers. Their concerns with discipline and pedagogical certainty were consistent with the struggle for survival that Huberman (1989) found to be characteristic of those at the beginning stage of their career (1-3 years). The socio-cultural context of the school served to heighten these concerns as the concept of structure, regulation and control appeared to be part of the package of being a 'good' teacher in the two DEIS 1 schools.

The pervasiveness of policy level discourses of efficiency that remain largely unexamined at an institutional level by teachers, also helped to account for the heightened search for certainty of practice and outcome that exercised the less experienced cohort. This was demonstrated in the way they embraced their role in implementing the DEIS literacy and numeracy programmes, and the pedagogical clarity with which they felt the programmes provided them. In this way the early career teachers' 'fear of failure' and the system's interests as a whole converged in a 'relationship of convenience'. Through their compliance, participants were discouraged from taking up responsibility in terms of actively engaging with, and possibly reshaping the curriculum and teaching and assessment mechanisms. While it is questionable if Irish teachers are forbidden to assume responsibility as Kelchtermans (2011) claims occurs in the case of 'scripted curricula', it is fair to conclude that the 'prescriptive' literacy and numeracy course materials and their 'rightness' were given primacy by the less experienced DEIS 1 teachers over their own professional judgment and expertise. In

return for 'following the programme' and the diminution of responsibility and erosion of their professional autonomy that their complicity entailed, a pedagogical road map was provided for those struggling with the 'realities' of teaching and the acceptance of professional vulnerability that this entails.

#### ***9.3.2.1 Professional and Life Experience: Plotting an Alternative Trajectory***

In contrast with more recent NQTs, the more experienced cohort demonstrated a greater capacity to resist to some extent the influence of the strong, neo-liberal performativity discourse. In this way, they managed to maintain a higher level of connectedness between their beliefs in education as a relationships based process, and their everyday practices. As a consequence, they adopted a more democratic approach to classroom management than their less experienced counterparts, and were less consumed by overemphasising their role in the fostering of literacy and numeracy. Through the development and accumulation of various personal resources and capitals, these more experienced (early career) teachers were empowered to plot a less certain, alternative pedagogical trajectory to the one followed by their less experienced counterparts. The majority of this cohort held special duties posts in their respective schools, and through the articulation of their duties in this regard, and the professional autonomy and responsibility that comes with such leadership positions, they occupied an agentic position in their respective schools (Day et al., 2006). By successfully attending to the duties attached to their in-school management positions, these participants spoke with enthusiasm of organising whole school events that both students and teachers benefitted from. In this way, they were centrally involved in reaffirming the significance of relationships in the wider educational project. This analysis indicates that the

practices and attitudes of these more experienced participants in this study were broadly consistent with those found in Huberman's (1989) study which found that this career stage to be characterised by increased experimentation and activism

Those participants that participated in masters' level studies in various educationally related areas were also identified as having a greater awareness of the workings of policy and how it impacts on teaching and learning. While not exclusively confined to the more experienced cohort, these participants and the broad critical reflection their accounts testify to, articulated a more robust interpretation of their professional responsibilities, manifested most vividly in their heightened willingness and confidence to work with and value diversity in their classrooms. Those participants that had taken alternative routes to becoming teachers also demonstrated a well-developed sense of political awareness and used this knowledge to inform positive practices in their schools. Barbara's use of her business acumen to widen the scope of her gardening project, and Donna's against the grain engagement with 'risky', democratic and reciprocal relationships with parents reflect their spirit of resistance. Cumulatively, these personally generated social, political and intellectual capitals have enabled participants with greater professional and life experience to appreciate the way in which politics influences and tries to shape the educational landscape. By re-imagining policy as problem, rather than policy as constraint they have developed strategies of resistance to those aspects of policy that are in conflict with their 'core mission' as educators (see Figure 4) (Korthagen, 2004, 2012, Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005)

### ***9.3 3 A Habitus Specific Idea***

While ideas around making sameness and care dominated the cohort's understanding of the difference they were making as a homogenous professional class, there were some significant variations of 'difference' found to exist along class and social background lines. In this regard, the 'Working Class-Close Proximity' cohort's perception of their professional role and responsibilities deserves specific attention. While the previous discussion shows that participants' perceptions of 'making a difference' was capable of change, what was significant about this cohort's 'core mission' was how well established, tenacious and durable it was. As a consequence, they were better able to maintain a consistency of connectedness between their beliefs, values and attitudes about teaching and learning, and their professional practice. This very strong sense of what it means to be a teacher influenced their pedagogies and educational relationships both positively and negatively.

As many of this 'Working Class-Close Proximity' cohort had attended designated disadvantaged schools themselves, they articulated a strong desire to 'put something back' into these schools and were strongly invested in a professional and moral identity of 'teacher as role model'. The strength of their adherence to this culturally ascribed role and the powerful moral purpose that underpinned it generated largely positive and some negative practices. Their greater familiarity with, and knowledge of students' local communities enhanced their capacity to 'connect' with students on a personal level, and they demonstrated a greater willingness than those from middle class origins to open up their personal histories for discussion. Their felt desire to try and initiate more open and

inclusive relations with working class parents also allowed them to resist to a large extent the boundary setting and professional protectionism that governed the majority of participants' relations with parents in the two DEIS 1 schools

While these practices reflected the generative quality of their class (working class cohort) and social habitus (close proximity cohort) in terms of perception and practices, there was also evidence of its more structuring and limiting quality (Codd, 1990) at play, which helps to explain the intensity of their engagement with institutionally embedded discourses of parental deficiency. The strength of their belief in the importance of students demonstrating 'good' 'educated' subjectivity (Kitching, 2011, p. 107), and acting appropriately within prevailing, non-controversial and non-political discourses of meritocratic participation, was reflected in the strong criticism they directed towards parents whom they perceived were letting their children down in their aspirations and deeds.

The small sample of participants from working class backgrounds means that research on a larger scale is required in order to further develop our understanding around the role class habitus plays in the difference teachers feel they can make. However, the very distinct and positive contribution they are making in social justice terms speaks strongly to the need to prioritise the development of direct access programmes to ITE programmes so that a greater proportion of individuals from working class and/or minority ethnic backgrounds can become teachers (EDC, 2004). However, the more problematic practices that were generated around their engagement

in role modelling points to the need to problematise the way in which the desirability of a more diverse and representative teaching force is framed in the literature. This discourse is largely oriented around the importance of children having positive role models from similar backgrounds to themselves (Dee 2001, Devine, 2011, King, 1993, Ladson-Billings, 1992), a positioning which was found to have a limiting effect on what the cohort as a whole can achieve in a transformative sense.

#### ***9.3.4 Agency at Work: Fluid and Relational Stories of ‘Making a Difference’***

In order to synthesise these various structural elements of ‘making a difference’ as a concept and construct, it is useful to articulate this analysis through the stories that the participants live by. Like these guiding narratives, participants’ idiosyncratic articulations of the difference that they felt they were making were developed over time, and in that sense were fluid and relational. Mirroring the dynamic of the habitus, participants’ definitions of their role and responsibilities are capable of solidifying over time, with positive and negative implications for the students they teach. Those participants with childhood ties to working class communities appeared to have a very durable and strongly defined educational vision, which generated many positive practices around making connections with the lived experiences of their students. Negatively, the tenacity of implicit cultural assumptions around working class deficiency and fixed ability across the cohort as a whole, tempered the aspirations they held for working class students.

However, participants’ understandings of ‘making a difference’ were also very much about the present, and these suggest conflicting and polarising interactions between

vision and realised practice. The educational vision articulated by the younger, less experienced members of the DEIS 1 cohort was skewed somewhat by their career stage vulnerability to discourses of conformity and performativity. Alternatively, the stories told by those with greater life and professional experience demonstrated the capacity for their stories and the identity positions that underpin them to change and yet stay the same. Through a process of reconciliation with their initial idealised identities of teaching as a progressive and/or liberating praxis (Furlong, 2012), these participants have to some extent *restored* their professional lives. Their ‘new’ stories offer possibilities of hope, resistance and transformation. The subtle yet important reconnections they made with practices that focused more on the heuristic and non-didactic modes of teaching and learning offer a counter narrative to the commonly held perception that teachers are “the passive victims of grand policy” (Day & Saunders, 2006, p. 267). However, this redefinition of their role was not just a product of a greater sense of professional efficacy and standing, it was very much concerned with the political. By engaging with the notion of education as a political rather than a neutral construct as it is commonly portrayed by neo-liberal ideology (Freire, 1992), these participants resisted to a large extent the policy and institutional factors that are ‘pulling’ teachers towards more instrumental types of practices.

## 9.4 Implications for Initial Teacher Education

As discussed in Chapter Four, one of the appealing aspects of Freire's work is that it offers alternatives to teachers (Q1, 1997). In-keeping with this emancipatory spirit, and supported by the conclusions reached in the previous section, I now suggest that it is through engagement with the political, as well as the moral, ethical and emotional dimensions of teaching that teachers can continue to make a significant difference to students' lives. Supported by evidence from the data, the role ITE can play in initiating and sustaining a process of political and social criticality amongst student teachers is explored. Prior to a discussion of some of the possible dimensions of such a necessary but challenging project, it is important to acknowledge an increased focus on the critically reflective practitioner that has emerged in the newly expanded primary teacher education programmes. Strongly influenced by constructivist ideals, these reconfigurations represent a significant step in terms of helping teachers to connect everyday classroom practices and decision-making with theories of social justice and diversity. However, as the findings of this study strongly indicate, still much needs to be done in this area, especially in terms of increasing recognition amongst teachers of the need to interrogate the politics of education at the macro level of policy and the micro level of individual praxis.



#### ***9.4.1 Working towards a Model of Social and Political Teacher Criticality***

Developing social and political criticality is a developmental and incremental process, and therefore it is important that strong foundations are laid at an early stage of ITE. Building awareness amongst student teachers of their positionality within the social context and the central role it plays in shaping what one sees and understands about the world (Sensoy & Di Angelo, 2012, p. 8) appears an appropriate starting point. From unquestioning belief in the legitimacy of a competitive meritocratic system, to the pervasiveness of theses of fixed ability and deficit, and the problematics around paternalism, the findings of this study point clearly to the need for teacher educators to provide pre-service and practicing teachers with opportunities to examine these implicit cultural assumptions and the damaging effect they can have on students' experience of schooling. Tentative evidence in relation to participants' retrospective accounts of their idealised identities found in participants' stories of becoming teacher is consistent with Furlong's (2012) findings which confirmed the continued prevalence of traditional constructions of teacher identity among Irish student teacher idealised identities. This, coupled with a middle class habitus guided many participants towards a profession 'which is entirely them' and hastens the need to confront students' lay theories of teaching that are often "well established, tenacious and powerful" (Holt-Reynolds 1992, p. 344), and socially and pedagogically conservative in their outlook (Boler, 1997, Furlong, 2012, Sugrue, 1996).

It is not sufficient to focus exclusively on ITE as a means of confronting these problematic identity positions and implicit cultural assumptions. The durability and

institutionally embedded nature of many of these problematic implicit assumptions, adds to the urgency of the call made almost two decades ago by Sugrue (1996) for the introduction of a project of identity exploration that focuses not only on probing student teachers' biographies, but also one that encompasses teacher mentors. Equally recent Irish research has reaffirmed the importance of teacher educators exploring their own identities (Furlong & O'Brien, 2010), a conclusion that is situated within a long-standing discussion on the persistence of a 'deficit view of the student' amongst teacher educators (Eisenhart, Behm, & Romagnano, 1991; Furlong, 2012; Johnson, 1992; Sugrue, 1996). This discourse strengthens the argument for mentors and teacher educators to have a strong sense of their roles and professional self before they can enable student and beginning teachers to embark on similar journeys of self discovery (Furlong, 2012, p. 81).

Integral to the process of developing criticality, conscientization and dialogic praxis is the need to initiate, develop and sustain an ongoing dialogue between a conscious self and the world (Freire, 1996). Therefore, it is important that any process of political and social criticality initiated in ITE involves a focus on the relationship between self, other, and *context* (O'Brien, 2011b, p. 16). This is best done when situated and immersed in the lived experiences of communities experiencing intense social challenge (Apple, 2011, Apple, Au, & Gandin, 2009; Freire, 1996). The findings of this study support this assertion, as they clearly indicate the positive effect of participants' interaction with working class communities during their youth, and subsequently during the course of their ITE. These experiences helped participants to develop a positive disposition towards working in marginalised communities, and was recognised and articulated in

their professional practice. In developing a model of social and political teacher criticality, what is particularly salient in this study is the relationship between opportunities that participants had in ITE to critically reflect on these ‘lived experiences’, and their subsequent awareness *and* willingness to use these reflections to develop a culture of collaboration with parents. The pre-service electives during ITE were highlighted by participants as having been particularly enriching experiences, not only in terms of developing their understanding of the everyday realities that many children growing up in marginalised communities face, but also that they occurred within the context of a programme that was very much concerned with engendering a culture of critical reflection amongst its participants. This alerts us to the importance of the nature of ‘reflection’ in teacher education, not only focusing on the instrumental concerns of the day which are neither irrelevant nor illegitimate (Kelchtermans, 2011), but also the need to shine a light on identity, on the ‘core’ of the person and the moral purposes of the teacher (Korthagen, 2004, 2012, Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005).

The needs, feelings, emotions, concerns and motivations of student teachers need to be positioned at the heart of professional reflection (Korthagen, 2004). While many participants demonstrated awareness of the socio-cultural and institutional impediments to some students’ and parents’ engagement with schools, few of them interrogated these political themes in terms of their relevance and connectedness to their own professional practice. In order to generate the emotional responsiveness that links reflection and action (O’Brien, 2011b), which in turn creates a liberating and transformative praxis (Freire, 1996), there is a need to reaffirm the central role emotions play in teaching and

learning, and the importance of teachers caring in a broad sense about their students' lives. In this way, care as moral praxis can act as a counterbalance and a force of resistance to the increasing influence of regimes of performativity and the technical rational modes of teaching that they promote. The importance of developing political and emotional consciousness in a symbiotic relationship is also illuminated.

However, a note of caution should be sounded. The findings of this study indicate that any discussion on the moral significance of the role and responsibilities of teachers should be broadened to include a deeper consideration of the *nature* of teachers' moral and emotional responsiveness. The capacity for it to be harmful, as well as helpful in terms of its impact on students' well being and personal development is a recurring theme throughout. Indicative of their moral purpose, this cohort's commitment to caring 'for' (Noddings, 2003) their students was an emotionally driven one, of wanting to 'make a difference'. However, the nature of some participants' emotional engagement had unintended negative consequences for their students. An example of this is evident in the way the Millplace cohort, in the main, resolved the felt tension they experienced in terms of the often conflicting positions they occupy as professional educators, and their feelings of obligation to meet the basic care needs of their students. They managed this by heavily, and in some cases exclusively, investing emotionally in the articulation of their care role. Consequently, they held and expressed views that teaching in a community that held high levels of social challenges left them drained of emotional energy and challenged their investment in their students' intellectual and academic development.

On another level, the harmful influence that unexamined and unconscious emotional engagement can exert on relationships in the educational context is evidenced in the propensity of many participants to indiscriminately and uncritically blame parents for the deficit of care that they felt some of their students experienced. Freire's assertion "that an over emphasis on emotionality can also be destructive and anti-dialogical, [and] Nussbaum's (1995) claim that blind emotion is as useless as 'blunt reason' in making moral decisions for action" (cited in O'Brien, 2011b, p. 20) is particularly apt in this regard. These examples highlight the importance of teachers developing emotional criticality in order to help them reflect upon the capacity for one's emotions to play a destructive, as well as a constructive role in teaching.

## **9.5 Recommendations for Further Research**

As a portal through which participants' experiences of the world were interpreted and made personally meaningful (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), this study's life history approach allowed me to gain rich insights into the stories that teachers live by, stories that are not only about the past, but also the present (Bruner, 1991). The depth of investment the study placed in giving voice to the lived experiences of early career teachers contrasts with an emphasis on quantitative research and a focus on test results and achievement that has defined the majority of state commissioned research on teachers working in designated disadvantaged schools (Eivers, Shiel, & Shortt, 2005, Inspectorate of DES, 2005b, 2011, Weir & Denner, 2013). While this study has provided new insights into the way early career teachers define their professional role,

identity and responsibilities, and the various ideological, policy and institutional constraints that influence this process, it has also raised many issues that could only be partially addressed within the context of its research remit. This section will outline the need for further research into the political dimension of teaching and teacher development.

In this chapter it is argued that the conceptual space of professional responsibility in teaching needs to be re-imagined in a way that reaffirms the importance of the moral, political and emotional dimensions of teaching as fundamentally relational. Due to the strength of their commitment to an ethic of care, the participants were very forthcoming in discussing the moral and emotional dimensions to their work, especially in relation to the articulation of their care role. However, they were significantly less articulate in terms of discussing the political dimensions of teaching and educational relationships. While this is significant in terms of the limited engagement participants had with themes of power and interests, and their relevance to their professional lives, there is a need to deepen our understanding of the role that school culture plays in this process. While this study was concerned with participants' individual stories and how they were shaped by the context of their personal and professional circumstances, its focus on the individual as the primary unit of analysis meant that school culture was an associative rather than a central concern. An ethnographic study situated in DEIS schools would provide a window into the power dynamics of the educational relationships that early career teachers have with school leadership, colleagues, and parents. Through observation of, and discussion on the small, and often perceived 'technical' decisions and judgements

that teachers make everyday, in terms of the teaching methodologies they employ, the course materials they choose, and the classroom management style they use (Kelchtermans, 2011, p 122), a context can be set for an exploration of teachers' political awareness and how it is shaped by shared understandings at a school level

Such a study also holds the possibility of examining more deeply the influence school culture has on teachers' beliefs and value systems, and consequently on the way they articulate them in practice. However, in light of the origins of these beliefs in their stories of becoming teacher, and the way in which they are intertwined with and core to identities (Devine, 2011), there is a need to supplement this research with a longitudinal study that traces the development of teachers' idealised beliefs and identities from their initial entry into ITE, through the probationary process as NQTs, and into the beginning and early career stages of their professional lives. This study has identified the messy nature of the links between teachers' beliefs and realised practice (Fives & Buehl, 2011), and some of the factors that have led to these links becoming attenuated and/or disrupted by feelings of obligation around satisfying the exigencies of accountability. However, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the role ITE, teacher induction and situated school factors play in this process of belief formation and/or development, it is necessary to document a 'real time' history of their development.

## 9.6 Final Thought

This research raises questions about the difficult terrain that early career teachers working in designated disadvantaged schools are asked to navigate. These teachers are being rewarded by a value system that on one hand mirrors ‘broader social discourses of fast capitalism and self preservation’ (Ryan, 2007), whilst on the other hand the profoundly moral (Fenstermacher, 1990, p 132) and *political* activity of teaching in a community experiencing intense social challenge obligates them to make “value-laden choices, in the attempt to do justice to the pupil that has been entrusted to one’s care and therefore one’s responsibility” (Kelchtermans, 2011, p 118). Further, they are negotiating a multiplicity of value systems regarding what it is to be a ‘good’ teacher, and the often ascribed identity positions that are generated around these discourses (Kitching, 2011).

In light of the balancing act that is required to satisfy all elements of these conflicting and competing ideologies, identities and responsibilities, we are drawn back to the question of whether it is reasonable to expect already overstretched teachers “to go the extra mile, to be professionally responsible rather than play by the rules” (Sugrue, 2011, p 182). Rather than orienting this discussion around a ‘question’, this study has shown that it may be more useful to frame it in terms of a series of challenges that are creating these demands, and the necessity for teachers to negotiate a path through them, that is harmonious with their personal ‘mission’ (Korthagen, 2012) or core values. Although ‘making a difference’ has been identified as a context, career stage and habitus specific



idea, it is also a personal struggle. As the findings indicate, each of the participants' professional situations has its own particularities. The demands the system places on teachers working in areas of social disadvantage highlight the importance of teachers taking due consideration of their own personal, professional, and situated circumstances in terms of mapping out the boundaries of their professional responsibilities. However, the parallel moral, ethical, emotional, and political dimension to these considerations (Kelchtermans, 2011) (that may conflict with their own personal and professional [self] interests) means that there is an inevitable, inherent and perpetual uncertainty, vulnerability and risk associated with the way in which they make sense of, and consequently address these demands. It is through a persistent commitment to this broad idea of professionalism that teachers can plot a route away from 'being' risk in terms of the professional marginalisation that a critical pedagogy exposes teachers to, to 'doing' risk in terms of their own commitment to a transformative praxis and all the uncertainty, but hope that it entails.

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**Appendix A:**  
**Informed Consent Letter**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

27<sup>th</sup> March 2011

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for agreeing to provide me with an interview as part of my research into the experiences of early career teachers working in designated disadvantaged schools. First a little about myself. I am a resource/learning support teacher in \_\_\_\_\_ I am also a mentor of newly qualified teachers and a facilitator of induction workshops for new teachers. Through your participation in this study, you are making a valuable contribution to my research for a PhD Dissertation for submission to St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra.

The (provisional) title of my dissertation is "*Making a Difference – What it Means for Early Career Teachers Working in Designated Disadvantaged Schools*". My research involves interviewing a number of early career teachers (minimum of three years experience and a maximum of nine years teaching) about their experiences of working in a designated disadvantaged school. Many teachers use the phrase 'making a difference' to explain their motivation to teach. This study attempts to explore what early career teachers' understanding is of 'making a difference' and what 'making a difference' looks like in practice.<sup>1</sup> The values and practices that make early career

teachers feel like they are realising their vision of 'making a difference' will also be explored

As a participant you will be encouraged to engage in a dialogue on your initial motivations for entering teaching and the influence your initial teacher education had on these motivations. The focus will then shift to your current context as a teacher in a designated disadvantaged school and the motivations that have sustained your commitment to your school.

The interview has four sections and will attempt to

- 1 Assess the influence of early career teachers' upbringing on their professional identity development
- 2 Define what 'making a difference' means for early career teachers and what it looks like in practice
- 3 Identify the factors that promote/inhibit the realisation of early career teachers' vision of 'making a difference'
- 4 Outline the values/practices that make teachers feel like they are achieving their 'aims' as a teacher

The interview will take approximately one hour and fifteen minutes. I will ask your permission to use a voice recorder during the interview to assist in the accurate transcription of the dialogue. If you agree to the use of the voice recorder, you are assured of the right to switch off the recorder at any time. If you wish, you will be

provided with a transcription of the interview and will have an opportunity to check it for accuracy

Every effort will be made to ensure your anonymity and confidentiality will be protected in the interview and subsequent analysis. Great care will be taken in the analysis and the presentation of data so as to avoid your identity or that of your school being revealed. If you agree to participate, you will be assigned a pseudonym and specific quotes from your interview will be used in the final write up. The legal limitations to data confidentiality will be upheld.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further queries. I can be reached by phone on \_\_\_\_\_ Alternatively you can e-mail me at \_\_\_\_\_@\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you again for agreeing to provide me with an interview for my research. It is greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

\_\_\_\_\_

Gareth Burns

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Schedule**

#### **SECTION 1: STORIES OF BECOMING A TEACHER**

##### **Journey to teaching in a DEIS school**

- Tell me about how you came to be teaching in a DEIS school and what you knew about the school before you came
- When you left college did you choose to teach in a particular kind of school?
- Is this where you started out, can you tell me about that?

##### **Influence of upbringing/significant adults on teachers' professional identity development**

###### ***Re. Family:***

- Many people in teaching come from families where there is a history or tradition of that, is that the case for you?
- Can you tell me a little about your (family) background and your decision to go into teaching?

###### ***Re. Community:***

- Can you talk to me about the community you grew up in?
- What was it like growing up in such a community?

***Re. School Days:***

- Can you talk to me about your own school days?
- How did you find school?
- What influence did your own education have on your decision to become a teacher?
- Did any particular teacher influence your decision to become a teacher?
- What did you admire about that teacher?

**Experiences of Initial Teacher Education**

- Were there any courses in teacher education that particularly influenced you?

**SECTION 2: DESCRIBING ‘MAKING A DIFFERENCE’**

**Evolution of participants’ vision of ‘making a difference’**

- What are the most important things for you as a teacher?
- What do you strive to achieve on a daily basis?
- Many teachers say that one of the primary reasons they entered teaching is to ‘make a difference’? What do you think about that?
- What does ‘making a difference’ mean for you in your daily work as a teacher in this school?
- Do you think your vision has changed since you started teaching?

## **Focus on Daily Practice**

### ***Content/Skills***

- How would you describe your approach to teaching?
- What does this mean on a daily basis?
- What for you are the key practices in relation to working with children?
- What do you see as vital for your students?
- How do you 'make this happen'?

### ***Educational Relationships***

- What impact does the approach you have described have on your relationship with your students?
- How would you describe your relationship with your students?
- How do you think they perceive you?
- What kind of relationship do students have with each other?
- How important is it to build relationships with your students?
- What do you do to help build relationships with your students/between students?

## **Underlying ideologies influencing practice**

### ***Recognition of hegemonic influence on education***

- Looking at this school, do you think children get a fair chance?
- How do you try to ensure that each of your students gets a fair chance?

### ***Pressures of the job***

- Are there any pressures that impact on your work?
- Where do these pressures come from?
- What effect do these pressures have on your ability to 'make a difference'?

### **Factors promoting/inhibiting participants' capacity to have agency and influence in their respective schools**

- What are the greatest challenges you experience daily?
- How do you cope with these challenges?
- How do your colleagues assist you in facing these challenges?

### **Diversity**

- What level of interaction did you have with children from diverse backgrounds prior to commencing your teaching career?
- Do you think your own background influences the way you interact with children from diverse backgrounds?
- Are there any particular challenges you experience as a teacher in relation to working with children from diverse backgrounds?

### **What values/practices make early career teachers feel like they are achieving their aims?**

- As a teacher, what is your definition of 'success'?
- What does success look like in practice?

### **Future orientation**

- As a teacher with     years experience, do you think you are the teacher that you want to be?
- What kind of teacher do you want to be in the future?



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